



**Episkopé  
and  
episcopate  
in  
ecumenical  
perspective**

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Faith and order paper  
102






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## INTRODUCTION

A consultation entitled "episkopé and episkopos in the eumenical debate" was convened by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches with a specific purpose in mind. It was to provide clarifying suggestions for the revision of the three agreed statements, "One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry". (1)

Let us briefly recall the background. In 1974 the Faith and Order Commission decided to submit to the churches three statements of agreement on baptism, eucharist and the ministry. The decision was later endorsed by the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Nairobi (1975). The Assembly asked the churches to send in their official responses to the texts by December 31, 1976. A large number of churches replied. The Faith and Order Commission is now faced with the task of revising the texts in the light of the responses received. It is hoped that this revision can be completed within one or two years and that the new texts can be shared again with the churches before the next Assembly of the World Council of Churches.

In their responses, several churches expressed their dissatisfaction with the way in which the text on the ministry dealt with the issue of the forms of the ministry and especially with the episcopate. They felt that paragraph 26 was insufficient and that a new approach was required. Some suggested that the Faith and Order Commission convene a consultation on this subject. At its meeting in Bangalore (1978), the Faith and Order Commission made this recommendation its own. The consultation was held in Geneva, August 13-16, 1979.

In preparation for the meeting, Professor J.K.S. Reid (Great Britain) had undertaken the task of summarizing the present theological debate on the theme; his survey helped the participants in the consultation to take into account recent developments in the thinking of the churches and particularly the findings of bilateral conversations. At the meeting itself, Professor R.E. Brown (USA) read a paper on the New Testament evidence on episkopé and episkopos and Professor J.D. Zizioulas (Great Britain) on the situation in the early Church. Finally the consultation turned its attention to the actual practice in the churches. Several papers served as guides in this discussion. Bishop A.R. Samuel (India) presented an account on the issue of episcopacy in the Church of South India. The Rev. M. Mbwana (Tanzania) had provided a paper on the situation in his country and the consultation was also able to make use of a paper by Mr S. Escobar on episcopacy seen through the eyes of a Latin American evangelical Christian. (2)

The consultation decided to draw up a brief memorandum on the main issues which will need to be taken up in the process of revising the agreed statement on the ministry. The memorandum is addressed primarily to the Faith and Order Commission and those who are in charge of the revision but, obviously, it will be of interest to all who actively participate in promoting the consensus among the churches.

Geneva, December 31, 1979

Lukas Vischer

- (1) Faith and Order Paper No. 73, Geneva: WCC, 1974
- (2) This paper was originally written for another purpose. It is reproduced here with the kind permission of the Anglican Consultative Council.



## MEMORANDUM

### EPISKOPE AND EPISCOPATE IN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE

The present memorandum discusses the main issues which arise in connection with the theme "episkopé and episkopos in the ecumenical debate". It has been written with a view to the process of revision of the agreed statements on baptism, the eucharist and the ministry. It does not intend to provide the draft of a new text on the ministry; it simply offers a number of reflections which might be relevant for the task of revision.

Clearly, the request to deal more fully with "episkopé and episkopos" widens the scope of the statement on the ministry. The statement of 1974 sought to clarify the necessity and the nature of the ordained ministry in the Church; it proposed convergences on some divisive issues such as apostolic succession and ordination. It did not deal extensively with the different forms of the ministry. The new text will need to be more specific on this point. It will need to deal with the question of what forms of ordained ministry are required to guide the Church. It will need to discuss the respective roles of the ordained ministries and the community in the episkopé of the Church. In short, the new statement will need to take up the following question: How, according to the will of Jesus Christ and under the guidance of the Spirit, is the Church to be shepherded today?

The question can be answered only on the basis of a reflection on the nature and calling of the Church. The statement of 1974 rightly affirms that the "understanding of the ministry must start from the nature of the Church, the community of believers" (para. 2). Indeed, the issue of the ordained ministry cannot be dealt with as an isolated theme. The ordained ministry exists for the Church. An adequate understanding of the ordained ministry, therefore, can only be reached by starting from God's purpose in calling and sending his whole people.

It would be wrong, however, to deduce from this intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the Church that the ordained ministry is a creation of the Church as if God called the Church into existence and the Church then established the ordained ministry. In other terms: the

Church's ministry is prior to the ordained ministry. These views cannot be maintained. The calling of the Twelve reminds us of the fact that, from the beginning, there have always been persons set apart for special service in the community. The Twelve are the prefiguration both of the future community of believers and of those who will serve them as ministers. Obviously, the forms of the ordained ministry are the result of developments in history. As the Church, created by God, through the redemptive work of the crucified and risen Lord and the power of the Spirit, participated in God's saving purpose, it was given the forms of ministry which it required.

Episkopé (overseeing, supervision) is essential for the life of the Church. No church can live without the exercise of some kind of episkopé. The churches deeply differ in their understanding of episkopé and their ways of carrying it out in the life of the community. Some regard it as a personal, others as collegial responsibility. The ecumenical task is the attempt to develop together the most faithful and appropriate way of exercising episkopé in the Church. Obviously, this requires the common scrutiny of Scripture and Tradition, but it also requires an effort to discover in which ways de facto episkopé is being exercised in each church and what legitimate concern they represent for the faithful and effective exercise of episkopé. The episkopé which the ecumenical movement seeks to develop will be richer than the episkopé in any of the existing churches.

The issues to be taken up are many. What is the relationship between the ordained ministry in general and the task of episkopé? What is the role of apostles and in what ways must their functions be continued in the Church? What are the respective roles of individual persons (episkopos), groups (college of presbyters), and the community in the exercise of episkopé? Episkopé in the local church and episkopé over several local churches? How are the changing roles of bishops in the course of history to be interpreted? How is a reconciliation between "episcopal" and "non-episcopal" (or to put it positively "presbyteral" and "congregationalist") churches to be achieved?

The consultation which drafted this memorandum decided to select seven questions which it considered to be of particular importance for the process of revision and to suggest answers which might assist the drafters in their task.

QUESTION I:           What is the relation of the episcopal ministry to the Church founded by Christ?

In speaking of the Church and of any specific ministry in the Church we should realize that Jesus came to renew the existing people of God by his proclamation of the kingdom. It is not surprising, therefore, that his words in the Gospels are not specific about a body separate from Judaism and even less about the structures of such a body. Nevertheless, in calling disciples and the Twelve he calls what will be the Church. The very existence of the Twelve among the other disciples means that there never was a totally undifferentiated Church. Some had a role that others did not; for only to the Twelve was given the eschatological privilege to sit on the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (see below Question II). Nor was the Church ever without ministry, present and gifted, for its mission and service, e.g. preaching the Gospel, proclaiming the Gospel to those who found themselves outside the law, caring for the faithful, administering the life of the community, etc.

The shape of the Church and the forms of the ministry are the products of experience and history as the Holy Spirit led the Church in life, worship and mission. We find, then, in the New Testament, a variety of forms of ministry in different times and places. By the end of the New Testament period (although it was of earlier origin), a twofold structure of presbyter/bishops and deacons was becoming more common in the Church of which we have knowledge. In the second and third centuries, the threefold structure of bishop, presbyter and deacon became dominant.

Often, particularly since the Reformation, the question has been debated whether such a threefold structure is a matter of ius divinum (specifically determined by the will of God) or of ius humanum (a product of human discovery). To a large extent, this question does not seem, in our opinion, to do justice to the issue. In the development of various types of ministry during the New Testament period and, a fortiori, of the threefold ministry, the Holy Spirit was at work, but so were historical and sociological factors. There is no need to see an either/or and a conflict between divine and human influences. In the development which resulted in the threefold ministry, then, there is no need to think either of a blueprint by Jesus or of the mere response to sociological laws.

When the development towards the threefold ministry is recognized as a gift of the Spirit to the Church, enabling it to exercise its ministry effectively, there still remains a question whether this form of ministry becomes the only divinely sanctioned ministry for the Church from that time forward; and similarly it is very difficult to decide to what extent subsequent developments after the third century

reflected the guidance of the Spirit and are to be retained. Certainly many churches which have other structures have regarded them as reflecting types of structure found in the New Testament, before the threefold ministry became universal in post-New Testament times. It has been argued that the variety of church structures in the New Testament justifies the diversity of structures which exists today in the separate churches. But this view has been rejected by others for good reasons. The situation of the nascent Church was different from that of the separate churches today. In the early Church unity could only be preserved by developing common structures. The issue is therefore what kind of common structure of ministry is required today to express the unity of the Church. On the basis of this consideration the question might be raised, in the light of long tradition and of present need for greater unity within and among the churches, whether an adoption of some form of the threefold ministry might not best serve the churches separately and together in the furtherance of their God-given mission. The task is not to debate the irrevocability of the past, but to respond to the way in which the Spirit may be calling the churches to unity today. The acceptance of a threefold ministry may come easier to the churches which for various reasons have hitherto resisted it precisely when those who accept that ministry acknowledge that in New Testament times the Spirit also worked through other forms of ministry.

QUESTION II:      What is the relation of apostles to bishops and in what sense are bishops in apostolic succession?

One must be careful to preserve the fulness of the New Testament references to the "apostles". Without attempting to be exhaustive, we note that "apostle" is a term clearly applied in the New Testament to the Twelve chosen by Jesus during his lifetime as representatives of the community of the renewed Israel. In that moment they are the community and they are also those who play a special role in the community (symbolized by Jesus' words that they are to sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel). The term "apostle" is also applied to Paul and to others as they are sent out by the risen Lord to proclaim the Gospel. And so the roles of the apostles cover both foundation and mission. As the Church looks back it remembers that words like the following were addressed to the apostles: "Do this in commemoration of me" and "Go therefore and baptize", but it is not clear whether it was thought that such words were addressed to them as representatives of the whole community or as those holding a special responsibility within the community. Moreover, when we speak of succession to the apostles, we have difficulty in deciding what aspects of the

apostolate are unique and to which there can be no succession (there are only twelve thrones; only some saw the risen Lord and were commissioned by him) and to which aspects there is a succession. In the latter category one would have to agree that there is succession to those aspects of the apostolate needed for preserving God's revelation in Jesus Christ and communicating it to others along with his life, his holiness and his Spirit.

In terms of episkopé, the best New Testament example of apostolic ministry applied to the churches is in the Pauline letters where we see the apostle teaching, exhorting, praying for, reproving, and judging Christians in churches he founded. At the same time, there are local leaders in these churches ("those over you in the Lord"; those who have the charism of kybernēsis; episkopoi and diakonoi). It is thus clear that an apostle can exercise episkopé without being himself a local bishop, and indeed we are not to think of apostles as bishops. When the apostles die, the care they once exercised for many churches is portrayed in at least the Pastoral Epistles as passing into the hands of persons the apostles had delegated who are to have presbyter/bishops appointed in every town. The presbyter/bishops, and eventually one bishop and a group of presbyters, exercise episkopé for the local church. What happens to the apostolic episkopé for a group of churches is not clear after the first generation. In a certain way, then, the presbyter/bishops, and eventually the single bishop, succeed to apostolic supervision of a local church - "in a certain way" because the bishops are not apostles.

We must also realize that apostolic succession is a wider matter than episkopé; it includes succession to faith, mission, etc. So in a very real way the whole Church succeeds to the apostles. Indeed, one of the first appeals to episcopal succession considers it as a sign that the churches are in succession to the apostles, especially as regards the truth. The bishops as successors cannot be divorced from the churches as successors - on that all would agree, although there may be disagreement on the exact degree to which it is in and through the Church that the bishop is successor to the apostle. As to the way in which a bishop was validly designated in apostolic succession, in the earliest days, the historical evidence is insufficient; there is no proof that all presbyter/bishops had hands imposed by the apostles or by other bishops who had thus been ordained by the apostles. Eventually, the laying-on of hands by other bishops became the accepted form of ordination. Despite the lack of historical evidence, some wish to maintain the chain of imposition of hands from the apostles to the early bishops as the traditional and still effective way of explaining apostolic succession. But others, including those who accept the historic episcopate, find that such an unprovable claim leads to resentment and/or to an emphasis on too mechanical an understanding of apostolic succession.

QUESTION III: How is episkopé to be exercised in the Church?

The issue of episkopé in the Church cannot adequately be dealt with by discussing the origins and the appropriate forms of the ordained ministry in the Church. The question must also be raised in what ways episkopé is to be exercised in the Church.

The New Testament gives no blueprint for the exercise of episkopé but, on the basis of the New Testament witness, it can be said that the exercise has three dimensions - personal, collegial and communal. Episkopé requires the authority and the commitment of single persons within the community. The presence of Jesus Christ in the midst of the people can best be witnessed to by one person proclaiming the Gospel and calling the community to witness and service. One person can provide an effective focus within the community and keep it in unity of life, worship and witness. The personal dimension is reflected in the role which Paul played in the churches which he had founded. However, the personal dimension needs to be accompanied by the collegial dimension. Personal episkopé can only be carried out in a collegial way. The authority of the one to provide the focus of the community needs to be tested by a group. The discovery of the will of God requires the insights and the interaction of several people. The apostles often act as a group, especially when difficult issues are to be solved. We also find references in the New Testament to presbyters or elders acting as a group. Finally, episkopé has a communal dimension. It is exercised not over the community but with the collaboration and participation of the community. Paul seeks the agreement of the whole community. In the report on the debate over the circumcisions of the Gentiles we find the significant formula "the apostles and the elders together with the whole community" (Acts 15:22).

These three dimensions must all have their appropriate place in the exercise of episkopé. The various systems of order which have been adopted by the churches must be examined in that perspective. Do they give adequate expression to each of the three dimensions? The threefold ministry is potentially a faithful mirror of the three requirements. The bishop exercising personal episkopé is surrounded by the presbyters acting as a college. They are acting together in the same eucharistic community. The deacons have the task to remind the community of its diaconal witness and to provide a link with the bishop and the presbyters. It must also be said, however, that the threefold ministry does not automatically reflect the three dimensions faithfully. In fact, in churches which have nominally preserved the threefold ministry the balance among them has suffered.

In the course of history the three dimensions have not been kept together. One or the other has been overemphasized at the expense of the others. The separate churches tend to reflect this one-sidedness. In some traditions, the personal dimension of episkopé eclipses the collegial and communal dimensions. In other traditions, the personal ministry tends to be drowned in collegial and communal processes. In this respect, the ecumenical movement could be described as the effort to restore the balance between the dimensions.

This vision was already developed by the First World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne (1927) whose report states:

"In view of (i) the place which the episcopate, the council of presbyters and the congregation of the faithful, respectively had in the constitution of the early Church, and (ii) the fact that episcopal, presbyteral and congregational systems of government are each today, and have been for centuries, accepted by great communions in Christendom, and (iii) the fact that episcopal, presbyteral and congregational systems are each believed by many to be essential to the good order of the Church, we therefore recognize that these several elements must all, under conditions which require further study, have an appropriate place in the order of life of a reunited Church ..." (1)

QUESTION IV: What is the relationship between bishops in the local church and bishops exercising episkopé over several local churches?

There is a clear difference between the bishop at the time of Ignatius and the ministers who are called bishops today. The bishop in the writings of Ignatius is the leader of the local church. He presides over the eucharist. He is surrounded by the college of presbyters, who, according to Ignatius, represent Christ and the apostles in the community. Thus, at the time of Ignatius, the threefold ministry was the form of ministry in the local church. The bishop exercised episkopé over the local church. As the churches grew in size and number, bishops began to exercise episkopé over several eucharistic communities and later even over larger areas. Today, in most cases, bishops are in charge of a diocese.

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(1) Proceedings of the World Conference on Faith and Order, Lausanne 1927. London: SCM Press 1927, p. 379

The development had far-reaching effects on the functions of the threefold ministry. Its inner balance was disturbed. The role of the bishop as the one presiding over the eucharistic celebration of the local church had now to be fulfilled by other persons. In fact, the presbyter/priest now carries the function which originally had been reserved for the bishop. As a consequence, the collegial dimension in the order of the local church suffered. After a few centuries, the diaconate ceased to fulfil any real function in the local church.

How is this change to be interpreted? Two remarks must be made. On the one hand, it would be clearly artificial to claim an unbroken continuity from the Ignatian bishop to later forms of episcopacy. The bishop today fulfils a new kind of episkopé. The model witnessed to by the Ignatian letter retains its significance for the life of the local church. There is need, in each local eucharistic community, for a bishop providing the focus of unity in life and witness by proclaiming the Gospel and presiding over the eucharist. He needs to be surrounded by a congregational council and there is little doubt that the renewal of the diaconate could give new impulses to the life of the community. The harm done by later developments to the life of the local eucharistic community needs to be undone.

On the other hand, there is an obvious need for episkopé over an area comprising several local churches. The development which resulted in ascribing to the bishop a new kind of episkopé is therefore not simply illegitimate. It would be equally artificial to ignore the need for larger episkopé. In fact, in recent times, many churches which in the past had stressed the role of the ministry of the local church have been led to create forms of ministry at a regional level. As long as no unbroken continuity with the Ignatian bishop is claimed, they can be called bishops. They exercise a role which is essential for maintaining the Church in truth and unity. For their episkopé to be effective, it needs to be exercised in a collegial way. The three dimensions - personal, collegial and communal - apply not only to the episkopé of the local church, but to all levels of the Church's life.

QUESTION V: What are the functions of the bishop in exercising episkopé over several churches?

The bishop's basic function remains to assemble the community and to strengthen its witness by proclaiming the Gospel and presiding over the liturgical and sacramental life of the eucharistic community. Episkopé at the level of an area is an extension of this function. It would be a mistake to regard episkopé at the level of an area as a merely administrative function. The ministry needs to remain rooted in the basic functions for whose fulfilment the ordained ministry has been given to the Church.



The responsibility for an area involves new functions. The bishop has to be the visible link between the local eucharistic communities; he will represent them to the wider community. He will strengthen the communion by exercising pastoral care together with the leaders of local communities. He will be attentive to issues which arise for the Church in the wider context, etc.

As an expression of the unity among the local eucharistic communities it is legitimate that the bishop is responsible for the ordination of the presbyter/bishops of the local church.

QUESTION VI: How can the past help us to shape the kind of episkopé we need today?

There is a danger that an appropriate response to a particular situation at one time in history is assumed to be normative for all future times. There is an equal danger of discontinuing, as no longer appropriate, a form of ministry which could, in fact, be effectively adapted.

We must therefore ask the question: To what extent do the structures of the past accomplish the task of the Church today? What forms of ministry inherited from the past should be modified or discontinued? What elements once used, then allowed to lapse, ought to be revived for effective use now? Hearing what the Spirit says to the churches is a matter of continual re-evaluation.

In the course of history, changes often take place which are not always at the Church's initiative. For example, the changes in the offices of episkopos and presbyteros in the fourth century were largely occasioned by the influx of new converts into the churches after the reign of Constantine. The changes were not deliberately designed to be an effective strategy to meet the new conditions, but grew less purposefully.

Without critical re-evaluation, a church may perpetuate ministerial practices which in changed circumstances are distortions of the life of the Church. When such distortions are seen as caricatures, rejection is almost inevitable. The churches today must seek to evaluate together the developments in the Christian inheritance both more appreciatively as well as more critically.

We must address ourselves, therefore, to the question of how the episkopos has changed and what effect the changes have on the ministry and the life of the Church.

Today, in most church union negotiations, there is a greater readiness among the non-episcopal churches to reflect afresh on the place of episkopé in their life and, for the sake of Christian unity as well as of pastoral effectiveness, to include some form of personal episkopé in their new structures. While this evidences a lessening of resistance against episcopacy among churches of Reformed and Congregational traditions, new forms of episkopé arise in movements such as the Pentecostal movement or the African independent churches. They present the challenge to the churches to find ways of coping with the new departures in the life of the Church.

In some traditions, episkopé is already exercised by women and the possibility of women among the episkopoi is becoming an ever closer reality. The relevance of this development to the present discussion is obvious, even if for some churches it constitutes an obstacle to union.

In some parts of the world, notably in ecumenical parishes or congregations in England and the United States and in situations where ecumenical task forces exercise some kind of responsibility over several confessionally separate communities, the need for a larger episkopé and an episkopos carrying responsibility for Christians belonging to other traditions raises pressingly the issue of new forms of episkopé.

In certain parts of the world, such as Latin America, Korea and the Philippines, the courageous witness of bishops in the struggle for justice and human rights has won a new recognition of the relevance of episcopacy from Christians who belong to non-episcopal traditions. In countries where authoritarian governments seek to determine the lives of their citizens, shepherd bishops are modeling another way of creating relationships in the community and in expressing the community's concerns.

These illustrations raise the question as to whether at this time in history the office of episkopos has acquired a new significance and whether there are new reasons for adopting this structure of ministry today.

We cannot suggest the precise form which episcopacy should take in future, but some guidelines can be discerned which imply both room for much diversity and need for reform in current episcopal practice.

1. Emphasis will be placed on the personal dimension of episkopé. The pastoral potential will be given priority over the administrative and bureaucratic aspects of the ministry. This must be a decisive principle in shaping the exercise of episkopé both where episkopoi exist at present and where the ministry is being adopted. When bishops cannot know all their "presbyter/bishops" personally,

when bishops are strangers to the congregations and their leaders, the size of the diocese will require modification.

2. Episkopé will be exercised collegially. In the life of the Church, bishops, presbyters, those who hold ministries in the congregation and the congregations as a whole work together for building up the body of Christ for its witness in the world. If any one of these elements becomes isolated, the Church suffers distortion in theory as well as in practice. Bishops, too, are subject to episkopé by the whole Church.

3. The episkopé will arise largely out of the need for relevant structures in mission. Engagement in struggle, sharing in the sufferings and aspirations of the Christian communities and the countries in which they live will mark the exercise of episkopé and the episcopal ministry. Such exercising will require an episkopé sustained by a deepened spirituality in which qualities of holiness undergird all of its ministry.

QUESTION VII: How can mutual recognition among the churches be achieved?

In order to manifest the unity of the Church, the mutual recognition of ministries is required. In fact, the differences among the churches with regard to the issue of the ordained ministry have proved to be the most stubborn obstacle on the road to unity. Often union negotiations between churches of different traditions have spent years of discussion on the ordained ministry before they were able to take the step into union. They had to reach agreement not only on the understanding, but also on the practice of the ordained ministry. Each church had to accept modification of its own understanding and practice to make mutual recognition possible.

Today, many bilateral conversations between confessional families devote special attention to the issue of the ministry. The multilateral discussions in the Faith and Order movement seek to formulate an agreement which can be accepted by all churches. These agreements will be effective only if the churches are prepared to modify their own practice for the sake of unity. Obviously, uniformity is not required for mutual recognition, but the churches must come sufficiently close to one another that each can regard the ministry of other churches as apostolic and all can witness and act together as one body.

In some form, episkopé is being exercised in all churches. However, it is discharged in various ways. It is important to identify in each church the way in which episkopé is exercised. Often, the same reality exists in two churches though different designations are used. Often, the three dimensions mentioned under Question III (personal, collegial and communal) are present and operative under unexpected names. The debate around mutual recognition must not only take into account the theories which the churches defend about themselves, but must deal equally with their actual life and practice.

Mutual recognition requires, in each church, a movement of renewal. Each tradition needs to re-examine its understanding and practice of episkopé in the light of Scripture and with a view to effective witness today.

Apostolic succession through episcopal ordination raises the most difficult issue for mutual recognition. How can churches of episcopal order and churches of non-episcopal (or synodal) order be brought together in one communion? All claim to live in continuity with the apostles. All regard their ministries as succeeding the ministry of the early Christian community. The difference lies in the fact that non-episcopal churches lack the sign of transmission through personal episcopal ordination. Can they not adopt this sign? There are good reasons for considering this step. A common sign expressing the continuity in the succession of the ministry is a powerful pointer to the apostolicity of the Church. It underlines the fact that the minister as guardian of the apostolic truth stands in a long line of ministers who have stood for the same cause. Though apostolic succession does not offer any guarantee for maintaining the truth, non-episcopal churches may gain a new dimension in their life by introducing the sign. The step raises a serious difficulty; inasmuch as by accepting episcopal ordination non-episcopal churches give the impression of disavowing the ministry of earlier generations. The difficulty can only be overcome if the episcopal churches agree that the ministry of non-episcopal churches has been blessed by the Holy Spirit and that, though perhaps in an irregular way, a kind of succession has taken place in it. Some churches, for instance, have transmitted the ordained ministry through presbyteral ordination.

The mutual recognition may be celebrated in a solemn worship at which the episcopal ordination will be introduced for all churches concerned. To facilitate such a step for the non-episcopal churches, the following considerations may be of some importance.

(a) Such an act would need to be an act of repentance by all; the episkopé of all churches requires renewed authenticity.

(b) No negative judgment on the past of non-episcopal churches should be expressed; non-episcopal churches should

not be obliged to abjure previous ordination.

(c) In the new wider communion all churches receive new life; those who have exercised episkopé in the non-episcopal churches should therefore participate in the act of recognition.

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A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE ON EPISKOPE  
AND EPISKOPOS

Raymond E. Brown

The total New Testament (NT) occurrences of three pertinent words are as follows:

- episkopein: "to supervise, oversee, inspect, care for" (I Peter 5:2) (plus a usage not directly relevant to our purposes in Hebrews 12:15)
- episkopé: "visit, visitation, position of supervisor, function of supervising" (Acts 1:20; I Timothy 3:1) (plus two passages in Luke 19:44 and I Peter 2:12, which are not directly relevant)
- episkopos: "supervisor, bishop" (Acts 20:28; Philip. 1:1; I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7; I Peter 2:25)

Obviously, those who are called supervisors (episkopoi) exercised some type of ecclesiastical supervision in NT times. But so did others, and so I shall begin by tracing evidence for supervision exercised by other types of people in NT times, and then narrow down to those who were called supervisors. In the NT only the Pastoral Epistles are ex professo concerned with church structure, and undoubtedly there was more supervision and structure for supervision than we know about. Since second-century institutions and church officers were not a creatio ex nihilo, it will be useful eventually (and with the aid of the paper by Professor Zizioulas) to trace first-century roots of second-century developments. However, it would be extremely dangerous to assume that the second-century situations that are never mentioned in the NT already existed in the first century. We must allow for the possibility of development and of increasing structuralisation as the great figures of the early period became distant memories, and local churches had to survive on their own.

## I. THE TWELVE

In Acts 1:20, Luke has Peter citing Psalm 109 (108):8: "His episkopé let another take", in reference to replacing Judas as a member of the Twelve. This means, as Luke looked back on the early Church from his position ca. A.D. 80, the members of the Twelve were thought to have had a function of supervising. What did that consist in?

All the Gospels portray a group of the Twelve existing during Jesus' ministry and I Cor. 15:5 shows them in existence immediately after the resurrection. So there is little reason to doubt that Jesus chose the Twelve. Why? There is only one saying about the purpose of the Twelve attributed to Jesus himself (Mt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30): that they were to sit on (twelve) thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The idea seems to have been that in the renewed Israel proclaimed by Jesus there were to be twelve men, just as there were twelve sons of Jacob/Israel at the first beginnings of Israel. The Dead Sea Scroll community of the New Covenant adopted the same symbolism for they had a special group of twelve in their Community Council (IQS 8:1).

Besides this symbolism, the evangelists tell us that Jesus gave the Twelve a missionary task (this may be influenced by the fact that they were also considered apostles - see below). Matthew 10:5-6 has those who constitute the Twelve being sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and 28:16-20 has the Twelve (minus Judas) told to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them and teaching them. Nevertheless, we do not know that all or most of them did this, since all references to them as a group after the ministry of Jesus portray them in Jerusalem. In the four lists of their names there is confusion about the name of one of them (Lebbaeus, Thaddaeus, Judas of James), and this probably means that by the last third of the century, while they were remembered as a group, the names of the minor figures were being confused and forgotten. In fact, the only ones who have any significant role in the NT are those who constitute the first four in all lists, the two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John. With or without Andrew they are portrayed as having a special role in the ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:16-20; 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33). In Acts, Peter and John play a prominent role in early preaching; Galatians 2:9 shows Peter and John at Jerusalem in 49. James the brother of John died a martyr's death in the early 40s (Acts 12:2). The only one ever pictured outside Palestine in the NT is Peter who went to Antioch (Galatians 2:11), and perhaps to Corinth (I Corinthians 1:12; 9:5). Otherwise the NT is silent on the fate of the members of the Twelve. The image of them as carrying on missionary endeavours all over the world has no NT support. The archaeological and later documentary



evidence that Peter died in Rome is credible, but the rest could have died in Jerusalem so far as NT evidence is concerned.

As for exercising supervision there is no NT evidence that any of them ever served as heads of local churches, and it is several centuries before they begin to be described as "bishops" of first-century Christian centres, which is surely an anachronism. Acts shows the Twelve exercising a type of collective influence in meetings that decided church policy (6:2; 15:6). They are regarded as having a foundational role, either collectively as their names appear on the twelve foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14), or in the person of Peter (Matthew 16:18), or with Peter and John as two of the pillars (of the Church) in Galatians 2:9. An important text for supervisory authority is Matthew 18:18 where the disciples (probably the Twelve) are given the power to bind and loose, whether that means admitting to the community or making binding regulations. It is given specifically to Peter in Matthew 16:19, and in Acts 5:1-6 we find him striking down unworthy members of the community. Also in John 21:15-17 Peter is told by Jesus to feed or pasture Jesus' sheep. One of the two Greek verbs, *poimainein*, involves guiding, feeding, and guarding. Thus there seems to have been a collective policy-making authority, and in the case of the best-known of the Twelve, Peter, a memory of pastoral responsibility. Otherwise the NT is remarkably vague about the kind of supervision exercised by members of the Twelve.

## II. ACTS 6: THE HELLENIST LEADERS AND JAMES THE BROTHER OF THE LORD

The Christians in Jerusalem are becoming numerous; and a dispute has broken out whereby one group of Jewish Christians (Hebrews), who exercise control of community goods, is shutting off aid to the widows as the most vulnerable members of the other group of Jewish Christians (the Hellenists). The basis of the dispute was probably theological stemming from the negative Hellenist attitude toward the Temple (to be revealed in Stephen's sermon). The Twelve summon the common Christian assembly called "the multitude" (*plēthos* in Acts 6:2,5; 15:12,30 is a technical term, related to the Qumran community meeting called a "Session of the Many": 1QS 6:8ff.), and they discuss the problem. Thus, in Luke's picture, by this time (mid-30s) there has already developed a structure for handling the common goods and also a deliberative assembly; but now more formal administration is needed to deal with a larger and less harmonious membership.

Three results come from this scene:

(1) Even to settle the dispute, the Twelve will not take over the distribution of community goods ("It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God in order to serve tables"). The fact that this is mentioned as a refused possibility means that they have not been doing it. The decision of the Twelve to avoid becoming administrators of a local church fits the statement made above that none of the Twelve was portrayed as a local church leader in NT times.

(2) At the suggestion of Peter, the Hellenists are given their own administrators whose (seven) names are listed in Acts 6:5. The fact that the dispute has been centered on distribution of food, described demeaningly as "waiting (diakonein) on table", has led to the erroneous designation of the Hellenist leaders as deacons, with the thought that they were the second-grade church administrators mentioned in Philippians 1:1 and the Pastorals. However, seemingly they were the top-level administrators of the Hellenist Christians, who not only supervised the distribution of common goods but also preached and taught (as seen from Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 and Philip's activity in Acts 8). They are the first local church administrators encountered in the NT. We do not know if they had a title, but by later standards they would not have been unlike the presbyter/supervisors (bishops) of the Pastorals.

(3) We are not told in Acts 6 if the Hebrew section of the Jerusalem community received a corresponding set of authorities; but we may well suspect they did, for afterwards (Acts 11:30) we find references for the first time to a group of presbyters (presbyteroi) who are handling the common food of the Jerusalem/Judaeian church. They are consistently mentioned alongside the Twelve in Jerusalem (Acts 15: 2,4,6,22,23; 16:4 - by "apostles" Luke means the Twelve). The parallel with the Jewish authorities mentioned in Acts 4:5,8 (the rulers of the people and the presbyters) and 23:14; 24:1; 25:15 (the highpriests, especially Annas, and the presbyters) is striking. Luke undoubtedly intends to show the Jewish Christian situation parallel to the Jewish situation, but historically it is not unlikely that the Jewish Christians took over the idea of presbyters from the Jewish synagogues. Just as Annas is singled out on the Jewish side, so is James (the brother of the Lord) singled out for a special role presiding over the presbyters in Acts 21:18. Although Luke does not identify him, this is surely the man at Jerusalem who was the brother of the Lord and whom Paul seemingly calls an apostle (Galatians 1:19), i.e. an apostle in the Pauline sense, not one of the Twelve Apostles. (The brothers of the Lord were not members of the Twelve as Acts 1:13-14 makes clear.)

This James was looked on as a pillar (Galatians 2:9), alongside two members of the Twelve (Cephas and John); he took a leading role in binding Gentile Christians in Antioch,

Syria, and Cilicia to Jewish food laws (Acts 15:13-21, 23-29; Galatians 2:2). The statement that he succeeded Peter as leader of the Jerusalem church is based on a misconception that Peter was the local leader of the church in Jerusalem. According to Acts, the Twelve did have a leadership in the Jerusalem church in the early days when that constituted all of Christendom, and Peter was the spokesman of the Twelve. But Acts 6 indicates that Peter, as the spokesman of the Twelve, refused administration properly understood when that became necessary because of numbers and complexity. Thus it is more proper to say that from the moment that the Jerusalem church needed specific leadership, James along with the presbyters played that role. That James was remembered as a person who exercised supervision over a church is confirmed by the Epistle of James. Whether or not it was written by him, such an Epistle with its instructions about behaviour, teaching and prayer life was thought to be appropriately attributable to him.

It would appear, then, that in the mid-30s a need for local supervision was recognized for the Hebrew and Hellenist communities in Jerusalem and was met in two different ways, respectively, James and the presbyters, and the seven Hellenist authorities. Each group would have managed the common funds, made decisions affecting life style of the Christians, and entered into discussions about church policy as regards conversions. The urging of the common assembly by the Twelve which led to this development is the closest the Twelve ever come in the NT to appointing local church leaders.

### III. THE PAULINE APOSTLE

In Paul's view, inevitably refracted through his own situation, apostles were those who were sent out by the risen Jesus to proclaim the Gospel, even at the price of suffering and persecution. Clearly from I Corinthians 15:5-7 "all the apostles" were a wider group than the Twelve. How ancient and how widespread was this Pauline notion of "apostle"? The I Corinthian 15 formula may be pre-Pauline. The idea of the missionary apostle was so well-established that it was applied to the Twelve when they were considered apostles. (There is probably a development: the Twelve were considered as apostles; then came the expression the "Twelve Apostles" in the sense that they were the apostles par excellence since they had also been called by the earthly Jesus; then "the Twelve Apostles" in an exclusive sense - only in Acts 14:4, 14 does Luke ever call anyone else apostles, i.e. Barnabas and Paul.) For instance, Matthew 28:16-20 has the risen Jesus giving to the Twelve (Eleven) a mission to the whole earth; also Acts 1:8 - even though it is dubious historically that many of the Twelve functioned outside Jerusalem. Whether Paul would have agreed that

most of the Twelve were apostles by his missionary standards is not known (he never calls them apostles), but certainly he recognized Peter as an apostle (Galatians 2:7).

If Paul is taken as an example of the missionary apostle, we find in his letters many examples of supervision exercised by the apostle. He teaches, he exhorts, he reproves, and he exercises judgment on bad members of a church. II Corinthians 13:2 implies that, when present, the apostles could punish directly, without need for consulting the community; and II Thessalonians 3:14 orders anyone to be ostracized who refuses to obey the apostles instructions in a letter. Nevertheless, despite relatively long periods passed by Paul at Corinth and Ephesus, the apostle is not a local, residential church leader.

Even from the earliest days of the Pauline mission, there were local church leaders who functioned while the apostle was alive. About A.D. 50 Paul told the Thessalonians whom he had converted a few months before (I Thessalonians 5:12: "Respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord (proistamenoι)"; Philippians 1:1 is addressed to episkopoi and diakonoi, proof that the title "supervisor" was already in use by A.D. 60; and I Corinthians 12:28 lists administration or governance (kybernēsis) as a charism at Corinth. We do not know: how these leaders at various Pauline churches differed from each other, whether they all had titles; whether there was a real office that was held for a period of time; what exact functions they had; whether those who served as leaders came forward feeling themselves called, or were elected, or were appointed by Paul. The appearance of leaders at Thessalonica within such a short time after Paul's evangelizing makes it quite plausible that sometimes he arranged for local leadership before he left a community. The Lucan statement in Acts 14:23 that Barnabas and Paul appointed "presbyters in every church" is probably anachronistic in the title it gives and in the universality of its claim, but probably quite correct that during his lifetime Paul sometimes appointed local church leaders in communities he had evangelized. No matter what supervision such leaders exercised, they were still subject to the overarching supervision of the apostle who could issue commands in all the churches (I Corinthians 7:17) and had a daily care for all the churches touched by his mission (II Corinthians 11:28). The supervision of the local church leader was modified in another way by the presence of other charisms in the community. In I Corinthians 12:28 the charism of administrators is mentioned only after many others: "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators". We do not know how such figures as prophets, teachers and administrators were interrelated in the supervision of a community.

The authority of the apostle seems to have been the highest (under Christ) in the churches of his mission. There is evidence, however, that a rivalry could develop when different apostles worked in the same community. At Corinth (I Corinthians 1:12) there is trouble when some proclaim adherence to Paul, others to Apollos, others to Cephas; and Paul is sarcastic about the efforts of "super-apostles" in a church he founded (II Corinthians 11:5). The danger of conflicting authority causes him to avoid building on another man's foundation (Romans 15:20), although others build on his foundation (I Corinthians 3:10).

It becomes important, then, that the various apostles preach the same Gospel: "whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed". The matter is especially serious when there is a difference between an apostle like Paul and a member of the Twelve like Peter or the head of the Jerusalem church, James the brother of the Lord. Although Paul is critical of the status of such "pillars" ("what they were makes no difference to me": Galatians 2:6,9), he recognizes that in one way or another they have enough power to render his efforts vain. (The text in Galatians 2:2 certainly does not mean that his Gospel would be wrong if they disagreed with him, for Galatians 1:8 excludes that; but refusal to accept Gentiles by Peter and James and John would have ruined Paul's efforts to keep the Gentile churches in union with the Jewish churches.) And so it was important that these figures extended the right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:7-9). All of this means that in facing a major problem like the conversion of the Gentiles without circumcision, figures with different types of supervision like Paul, James, and Peter all had a say in the outcome. On the other hand, they might well disagree in other matters, for instance, in the obligation of Gentiles to observe the Jewish food laws. Peter, who had been under the influence of Paul, switched when men from James challenged his behaviour at Antioch, perhaps because Antioch was James' sphere of influence in such matters of local Christian interrelations. Certainly the policy advocated by James and adopted for Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:20,23) on Gentile obligations about food dedicated to idols was not the policy Paul insisted on in the churches of his mission (I Corinthians 8). Yet while Paul may have felt free to have one policy in Corinth while James had another in Jerusalem and Antioch, when Paul went to Jerusalem he may have had to follow James' policy on Jewish obligations, if Acts 21:23 is historical.

Thus, when we speak of supervision exercised by the three best known figures of the ancient Church, we have to recognize that the NT itself shows different areas of competence (both in terms of subject and geography) among Peter the first-listed and spokesman of the Twelve, James the leader of the Jerusalem (mother) church, and Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

#### IV. THE PRESBYTER-BISHOPS AND THE SUCCESSION TO THE APOSTLES

If many of the Pauline churches had local leaders during the apostle's lifetime (some of them, at least, appointed by him), the question of local-church leadership became a major concern in the 60s just as Paul was about to die (if the Pastoral Epistles are genuine) or more likely in the 70s-90s (if the Pastorals are pseudonymous and yet describe a situation that precedes Ignatius of Antioch). Titus was left in Crete "to set in order what was wanting and to appoint presbyters in each city" (Titus 1:5), and qualifications for an episkopos, "supervisor, bishop", are given to help Titus in his task. The very fact that Titus has to be told to do this means that there were not yet presbyter/bishops in all the churches of the Pauline mission and confirms the suspicion that Luke was anachronistic when he said that in the late 40s Barnabas and Paul appointed presbyters in every church (Acts 14:23). He was probably describing what was going on in Pauline churches when he was writing Acts (80s).

We may begin by noting that the Pastorals are meant to give authority to Timothy and Titus, companions of Paul, to structure churches, even as the apostle is beginning to disappear from the ecclesiastical scene (II Timothy 4:6). There was then a period of post-apostolic supervision by second-generation apostolic delegates who acted in the name of the apostle on the grounds that they had accompanied him and new his mind. There must have been resistance to such apostolic delegates (and if the Pastorals are pseudonymous, Paul is being summoned from the grave to still the resistance). In I Timothy 4:12 Paul is pictured as encouraging Timothy not to let himself be despised and in II Timothy 1:6 to rekindle the gift of God that is within him through the laying-on of Paul's hands. Such apostolic delegates would have been an intermediary stage of supervision between the apostle's great personal authority over the churches he founded (40s-60s) and the period when the local church leaders became the highest authorities (second century). If we know by name second-generation apostolic delegates who exercised quasi-apostolic authority, were there later third-generation apostolic delegates (disciples of disciples of the apostles) who were not local bishops? We know little about that. Eventually the apostolic function of not being closely attached to a local church but of supervising a whole group of churches who have a common heritage disappears. In this sense local bishops succeeded to the apostolic care for the churches, in a partial way which was later enlarged with the development of the patriarchates, the papacy, etc. In all this one should note that in the NT succession in pastoral care is to the apostles in the Pauline sense. The idea that the Twelve were apostles (and eventually that they were the

only apostles to be reckoned with) would ultimately lead to the understanding that they were the apostles to whom the local church leaders succeeded. In the NT, however, the Twelve are never described as founding churches, and so there is no real issue of succession to their pastoral care. However, see below on I Peter.

Moving on from the apostolic delegates to the local church leaders described in the Pastorals, we find that in these letters there have emerged established offices for which qualifications are given. Some of the qualifications (I Timothy 3; Titus 1) are institutional, so that no matter what abilities a person may have, the person will be rejected because of stipulations that are only secondarily related to what the person will be doing (no recent convert nor a person who has been married a second time is eligible to be a presbyter). This factor, plus the idea of appointment by an apostolic delegate, means that personally experienced charisms have ceded to community acknowledgement in determining who shall have supervision. Yet we know little more about this determination, once the apostolic delegate disappeared from the historical scene. After the Pastorals (or even contemporaneously with them but in other churches) we do not know how office holders received their office, e.g. by election (Didache 15:1), by the influence of other churches who had leaders, or by descent from a previous office holder, etc. There is nothing in our NT literature of the first century about a regular process of ordination, although surely sometimes hands were laid upon them. (A fortiori there is nothing to support the thesis that by a chain of laying on of hands every local church leader could trace a pedigree of ordination back to "the apostles".) Nor do we know whether church offices were held for a limited time or for life.

Let us now turn to the designation of the local church officials. It is not germane to our topic of "church supervision" to discuss recognized community roles or "orders", such as widows or virgins, which are not recorded as exercising supervision. In the Pastorals, there seem to be two offices set up for pastoral care of the community, a higher office and a subordinate office, and the holder of each seems to have two titles, respectively, the presbyter or bishop, and the "younger" or deacon. One document may speak exclusively of the two officers as "episkopoi and diakonoi (Philippines 1:1), while another document may speak of presbyteroi (literally "elders") and neoteroi ("youngers" - I Peter 5:1,5). Yet certain passages betray an interchangeability of these sets of titles. The interchangeability of presbyteros and episkopos is seen not only in the Pastorals (Titus 1:5,7; I Timothy 3:1; 5:17), but also in Acts 20:28 where those who have previously been designated as the presbyteroi of the church of Ephesus are told, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you episkopoi to shepherd the church of God".

Similarly, in I Peter 5:2-3, Peter addresses himself to presbyteroi, "Feed the flock, being supervisors (episkopountes) not by coercion but willingly" (however, the second Greek word is missing from Vaticanus and the original hand of Sinaiticus). The interchangeability of neōteros and diakonos is attested by the parallelism in Luke 22:26: "Let the great one among you become as a neōteros; let the one who rules become as a diakonos." (The fact that neōteros is not simply an age bracket but another name for the subordinate office has frequently been missed, giving strange combinations, e.g. where I Peter 5:1-4 with its reference to presbyteroi is correctly understood as a reference not to elderly men but to holders of presbyteral office, the next verse (5:5) is thought to shift with its neōteroi to the theme of youth!) Why two sets of titles? If we concentrate on the higher office, it has often been suggested that one title presbyteros was in use among Jewish communities, while the other episkopos was in use in the Gentile Christian churches. This is a guess, since the evidence we have for the use of presbyteros in Jewish Christian communities is Acts' account of the Jerusalem community (see II above), and Acts describes the officials of the Gentile Christian communities as presbyteroi too (Acts 14:23; 20:17). A more plausible theory is that we have here a reflection of two strains of Judaism which came into Christianity. The synagogues of Pharisaic Judaism had a group of zēqēnīm, "elders", the Hebrew equivalent to presbyteroi, who formed a council, setting policy, but were not individually pastors responsible for the spiritual care of individuals. The community of the New Covenant at Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls) had beside zēqēnīm officials who bore the title of mēbaqqēr or pāqīd, synonymous words meaning "supervisor, overseer". These functionaries, usually assigned one to a group, did have pastoral responsibility. The higher Christian office described in the Pastorals may combine the group of presbyters from the Pharisaic synagogue with the supervisor of Jewish sectarianism, so that the presbyteroi served also as supervisors. (This origin would explain why in Titus 1:7 episkopos is singular while in 1:5 presbyteroi is plural.) While our evidence is that there is a general interchangeability between the title presbyteros and the title episkopos, it is possible that not all presbyters assumed the title and role of supervisors. I Timothy 5:17 speaks of the double honour due to "those presbyters who rule well" (using proestōtes for "ruling" - the same term applied to church leaders in I Thessalonians 5:12, and thus alerting us that more titles than two may have come together for church leaders). Does the author in this phrase mean that while all presbyters rule, only some rule well, or that only some presbyters rule? The latter seems more plausible since Paul goes on to single out those presbyters "who labour in preaching and teaching", which surely means that not all had those tasks. The body of presbyters, then, may have divided up among themselves tasks once handled by people with



different charisms, e.g. the teachers and administrators of I Corinthians 12:28. Professor Lizioulas' paper will deal with Ignatius of Antioch and the emergence of a three-fold office where there was one bishop, a group of presbyters and a group of deacons (a situation not attested in the NT), so that episkopos was no longer the equivalent of presbyteros. However, in light of the above discussion attention should be paid to Polycarp, Philipines 5:3, for there neōteroi are told to be subject to both presbyters and deacons. Just as presbyters ultimately became subordinate to bishops, so neōteroi became subordinate to diakonoi and at least for a brief period the two sets of terms yielded four offices or roles.

That the term diakonos could be applied to a woman is known from Romans 16:1. In the passage on deacons in I Timothy 3:8-13, rules are laid down for women in 3:11, and some have argued that these are the wives of deacons. (However, the clear reference to the deacon's wife in 3:12 may be introducing a new but related topic.) Whether they are or not, they surely serve as deacons, since the author speaks of the rules for them as similar to the rules for (male) deacons. In view of the high plausibility that there were men and women deacons in the churches of the Pastorals, and that neōteros was another term for diakonos, a passage in I Timothy 5:1-2 raises the question of whether there were also both men and women presbyters. The apostolic delegate is told by "Paul" how to treat presbyters and "youngsters": "Do not rebuke a presbyteros but exhort him as you would a father, and neōteroi as you would brothers; presbyterai as you would mothers, and neōterai as you would sisters." It is most often assumed that age brackets are meant, and indeed neōterai refers to younger women who are widows in 5:11, 14. Nevertheless, every other passage dealing with presbyteros in the Pastorals is taken to refer to office-holders, including two passages in this same chapter of I Timothy (5:17, 19). This argument is offset by the fact that the parallel passage in Titus 2:1-6 (which speaks of the male presbytēs and neōteros and the female presbytis and neā) deals with age groups. But we can say that if there were women presbyters as there were women deacons, it should be remembered that not all presbyters seem to have ruled (i.e., served as an episkopos). The prohibition in I Timothy 2:12, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over men", may have been thought all the more necessary if women held an office that allowed many of its male occupants to teach and rule.

What were the precise supervisory roles of the presbyter/bishops and the neōteroi/deacons? I Timothy 3:8-13 describes only the qualifications of the deacons, and so we know nothing of what they did. (That they waited on table is an idea stemming from the false assumption that deacons were involved in Acts 6:1-6.) Since the name diakonos describes a servant, perhaps the deacon should not be thought of as

an office of supervision in the NT. As for the presbyter/bishop we know that some or many taught (I Timothy 5:17), especially having the role of confuting false doctrine and protecting the purity of the community faith (Titus 1:9). From the insistence that the presbyter/bishop must be able to manage his own household, being no lover of money (I Timothy 3:3-5; also I Peter 5:2, "not for shameful gain"), and from the rhetorical question, "If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for the church of God?" (I Timothy 3:5), we may suspect that the presbyters handled the common goods of the community. The image of the shepherd appears frequently for presbyter/bishops (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2), and so their supervising authority was like that of shepherds over sheep, feeding, guiding, and protecting. It is scarcely accidental that at Qumran CD 13:7-19 assigns exactly those roles to the "supervisor": he is like a shepherd over sheep, he manages the common goods, he is a teacher and inspector of the doctrine of the members of the community.

No cultic or liturgical role is assigned to the presbyter/bishops in the Pastorals. The closest to that in the NT is James 5:14-15 where the presbyters of the church are called in to pray over the sick person and anoint him in the name of the Lord, so that "the prayer of faith will save the sick person". This passage in James confirms the existence of presbyters in a non-Pauline church of Jewish origins where the name of James (the brother of the Lord) was venerated, and may be related to the information given in II above about James and the presbyters at Jerusalem (information found in Acts). I Peter 5:1-4 addressed to the churches of northern Asia Minor shows the existence of presbyter/bishops in another area where Peter was looked upon as an authority. (Parenthetically, it should be noted that letters of pastoral concern, closely similar to Pauline style, attributed to Peter, portray him as having an apostolic care for specific churches, and confirms the observation that of the Twelve Peter came closest to the Pauline notion of an apostle.) The idea that Peter spoke as a "fellow presbyter" telling presbyters how to behave is not unlike that of Paul in the Pastorals giving the qualifications for presbyter/bishops. Thus in churches associated with the three great apostolic figures of the NT, Paul, James and Peter, presbyters were known and established in the last third of the first century.

Professor Zizioulas' paper will discuss the exclusive role of the bishop and presbyters in relation to baptism and the eucharist in the churches addressed by Ignatius of Antioch. There is not a word of that in the NT. Various other people baptize: the Twelve (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:41); Peter (Acts 10:47-48), Philip the Hellenist leader (Acts 8:38), Paul the apostle (I Corinthians 1:14-17, but "Christ did not send me to baptize"). We know virtually nothing of who presided at the eucharist in NT times. The instruction to do so is given to the Twelve in Luke 22:19 (I Corinthians 11:24), but not in Mark/Matthew. In Acts 13:2 in the church of Antioch prophets and teachers "liturgize" (leitourgein). This finds

an echo in Didache 10:7, "Allow the prophets to 'eucharistize' (eucharistein) as they will". (Association of the prophet with the eucharist is not so strange when we realize that the NT prophets, men and women, often know and predict the future, and the eucharist was thought to proclaim "the Lord's death until he comes" (I Corinthians 11:26).) Between the NT position where prophets and teachers have a liturgical role and the Ignatian position where the bishop and presbyters have that role comes the situation in Didache (Pastorals 80-90; Didache 100; Ignatius 110 by way of dating?). In the church of Didache there are still prophets and teachers, with prophets holding the eucharist; yet the author urges, "Appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons ... for they are your honourable men together with prophets and teachers" (Didache 15:1-2).

For many NT churches we do not know how supervision was exercised, especially once the Twelve and the apostles were dead. Matthew (18:15-18) has clear ideas on how authority is properly exercised but tells us nothing about officials in his church who might be doing this. He knows of Christian prophets (10:41) and of Christian scribes (13:52); and so some have surmised that his was a community with prophets and scribes, but not yet presbyters/bishops and neōteroi/deacons. This would be a stage less advanced than Didache, a work that has Matthean affinities. In any case he will not let those who teach be called rabbi, for there is only one teacher, Christ. Nor will he let any be called leaders (kathēgētes), for Christ is the only leader. Nor is anyone to be called father (Matthew 23:8-10). In this he differs from other NT works where there are human teachers (I Corinthians 12:28,29; Ephesians 4:11) and Paul calls himself a father towards his community (I Corinthians 4:15). The fascination with developing structure and offices in the late first century had its dangers, and Matthew was alert to these.

## V. THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

Also alert to the danger of human authorities were the Johannine writers. (I assume that the evangelist was not John one of the Twelve, nor was the epistle writer the same as the evangelist, although they were of the same school. I do not think we know who the Beloved Disciple was, although he was a companion of Jesus and the community hero, and a source for the evangelist.) John 21, which may be a late Johannine addition to the Gospel, shows Peter as a shepherd but not the Beloved Disciple. This probably means that the human shepherd role had not been part of the community's tradition and was only now coming in from the outside (whence the need to assure the readers that Jesus authorized it). The author of II-III John calls himself "the presbyter" (and I assume he wrote I John as well), but in

the three epistles he does not act in a way similar to the presbyters described in the Pastorals and Acts. They teach and keep out any who advocate false doctrine. The Johannine epistolary author is facing false doctrine as well on the part of a group who have seceded from the community (I John 2:19), but the author cannot teach on his own authority that they are wrong. He has to say to his readers that they have no need of teachers and should know what is false on the basis of anointing by the Spirit (I John 2:27). The secessionists have left, but there is no suggestion that the author was able to expel them. And in III John when he deals with Diotrephes who rejects his authority, the most he can do is to threaten "to bring up" before the community what Diotrephes is doing. All of this makes sense in light of John 14:26 where the Paraclete is the one who teaches the Christian all things, and every Christian possesses the Paraclete. The author of the epistles can speak as part of a "we" who are the witnesses to the Johannine tradition (I John 1:1-4), and thus join himself to the witness of the Beloved Disciple, but he cannot present himself as a teacher (as his opponents seem to be doing). And if his opponents also claim to possess an anointing by the Spirit as well, all he can do is say, "Test the Spirits" (I John 4:1). When a stricter authority develops in a Johannine church, it is in opposition to the author. The Diotrephes of III John 9-10 is making himself first in the local Johannine church, seemingly along the lines of an Ignatian bishop, and is not allowing the presbyter to send in emissaries. Some have thought Diotrephes was propounding false doctrine, but the author, who is so hard on the secessionists, offers no doctrinal critique of Diotrephes. He may have been on the same side doctrinally as the author, but have realized that author's trust that people would be led to the truth by the Spirit was not working (as I John 4:5 concedes). Thus III John and John 21 (Peter as the shepherd) suggest that, while it was foreign to the genius of the Johannine community, a greater supervisory power of the presbyter/bishop type may have been introduced over opposition in segments of that community in order to resist false teaching.

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This survey shows that the manner and exercise of supervision varied greatly in different places and different periods within the first century or NT era. Only at the end of the century and under various pressures was a more uniform structure developing. The death of the great leaders of the early period left a vacuum (Peter, Paul, James all died in the 60s); doctrinal divisions arose; and there was a greater separation from Judaism and its structures. By the 80s-90s the presbyter/bishop model was becoming widespread, and

with the adjustment supplied by the emergence of the single bishop that model was to dominate in the second century until it became exclusive in the ancient churches. Many of us see the work of the Holy Spirit in this whole process, but even those who do must recognize that I Clement is giving a theological analysis but overly simplified history when he states (I Clement 42) that Christ appointed apostles (seemingly the Twelve) and that the apostles appointed their first converts to be bishops and deacons in local churches.

EPISKOPE AND EPISKOPOS IN THE EARLY CHURCH  
A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE EVIDENCE

John D. Zizioulas

The early Church evidence, beginning with the so-called Apostolic Fathers, differs from that of the New Testament in two fundamental respects, with regard to the notions of episkopé and episkopos. On the one hand, the content and function of episkopé is now clearly defined. On the other hand, the ministry of episkopos acquires its own specific content in relation to other ministries, particularly that of the presbyters, and becomes central to the whole structure of the Church.

In order to study the evidence concerning the content of this ministry, it is important to draw, right from the start, a line of demarcation between two periods of the early Church, namely that of the first three centuries and that of the fourth century and afterwards. The understanding of episcopacy differs fundamentally in each of those two periods. It is misleading to assume, as it is commonly done, that the idea of episcopacy which has been known to the Church from the fourth century onwards and which determined the debate between the Roman Church and the Reformation in the sixteenth century and afterwards, is identical with that of the first three centuries. This point is of crucial importance for the ecumenical dialogue of our time.

Following this point we shall divide this paper into three parts. In the first place an attempt will be made to describe, as briefly as possible, the view of episcopacy as it is presented in the sources of the first centuries, beginning with the Apostolic Fathers, especially I Clement and Ignatius, and ending with Cyprian in the third century. This will be followed by a brief section in which this evidence will be contrasted with the view of episcopacy which develops in the ancient Church gradually from the fourth century and afterwards. Finally, in the last section we shall attempt to draw some conclusions in order to see in what ways this ancient tradition is relevant to our concerns today.

## I. THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES

A. The evidence of Ignatius of Antioch concerning the content and significance of episcopacy is normally presented as marking a radically new beginning, almost a revolution, in the history of the early Church. This is done not only by comparing Ignatius with the New Testament evidence but also with his non-biblical contemporaries, such as I Clement, the Didache, etc. While such a presentation of Ignatius is perhaps justifiable with regard to his singling out of the office of the bishop (the so-called, wrongly as far as Ignatius is concerned, "monarchical episcopacy") and the emphasis he places on its importance, it is not justifiable with regard to the fundamental presuppositions of his position which are shared by all of his contemporaries. This is evident from the significance attached to episkopé in these documents; while there may be an obvious difference in the way Ignatius speaks of episkopos compared with his contemporaries, there seems to be no difference between them concerning the content and significance of episkopé. What is radically new in the history of the Church represented by these documents is not Ignatius' view of episcopacy but the emergence of an entirely new situation for the Church due to the disappearance of the apostolic generation. It is by examining the way in which the post-apostolic Church reacted to this situation that we can appreciate the background against which the notion of episcopacy developed at that time.

A careful study of all three sources mentioned above (Ignatius, I Clement, Didache) reveals that in all of these the problem of the transition from the apostolic to the post-apostolic period is faced with the help of the function of episkopé, and that all of these sources attach the same content to this function. If we consider, in the first place, I Clement, we see that it holds a radically different view of apostolic succession from that of Ignatius, the former speaking of a linear historical transmission of ministry from God through Christ to the apostles and finally to episkopoi kai diakonoi (ch. 42), while the latter holding a more eschatological view of the Church whose ministry instead of being historically transmitted is iconically portrayed in the eschatological community of the eucharist. But when it comes to the point of describing the content of the ministry which is needed for the post-apostolic communities to make sure that they are in communion with the departed apostolic generation, both Ignatius and I Clement agree that this ministry is that of episkopé. I Clement, which uses the term presbyteroi to describe the governing body of the Church, calls their function episkopé (ch. 44) (the presbyters of Corinth were expelled from this "episkopé"). And what is even more significant is that in describing this function I Clement calls it a leitourgia and quite clearly identifies it with the offering of the eucharist (ibid).

similar observations can be made with regard to the Didache. Here again the main concern seems to be how to secure the transition from the apostolic to the post-apostolic generation, and the way to do so is through the ordination of episkopoi kai diakonoi who will replace the charismatic "teachers and prophets" and perhaps apostles in their function (leitourgia) of eucharistia (15, 1ff.). It must be noted that these episkopoi kai diakonoi are not introduced for the first time into the community to replace the "prophets and teachers": they are simply made now the focal ministry in the transition at the expense of the travelling ministers who no longer constitute the link between the apostolic and the post-apostolic churches. This, as it is plainly witnessed to by the Didache, I Clement, Ignatius and other documents of that crucial period of transition (e.g. III John: the case of Diotrephes), shows that the link between the apostolic and the post-apostolic Church is the local community. A curious but crucial and decisive fact of the Church's history is that the transition from the apostolic to the post-apostolic Church has taken place not through a series of missionary delegates, but via the local communities. It was by making each local church a full and catholic church, capable of judging any "universal" minister, that the Christians of that time moved to a state of existence in which the apostles were no longer present. This is the strikingly universal situation which unites Ignatius with the rest of his contemporaries in what concerns the very ground of the rise of episcopacy.

All this shows that the emergence of the ministry of episkopé as central in the early Church cannot be properly understood unless two other factors which seem to accompany it in the existing sources are taken into account, namely the understanding of the local church as a "catholic", i.e. full church (which can judge and eventually expel a supra-local minister) and the leitourgia or ministry of the eucharist "offering the gifts of episkopé" (I Clement). The centrality of the ministry of episkopé becomes questionable both historically and theologically as soon as these factors are not taken seriously into account, while by considering them carefully we can understand why things developed the way they did, including Ignatius' view of episcopacy.

B. Ignatius seems to differ from the rest of his contemporaries mainly in one respect: he singles out the bishop from the collective whole of "presbyteroi" or "episkopoi" (kai diakonoi) as a ministry in itself, thus leading us from the episkopé to the episkopos. Whether this step is as radical as it is often taken to be depends on the extent to which one takes into account the full historical picture behind the rise of episcopacy as we have just described it. Quite apart from any apologetic concern, the question should be asked whether Ignatius' position could have been avoided in the end, once the ministry of episkopé emerged the way it did, i.e. in close relation to the two factors we



mentioned above: the catholicity of the local church and the eucharist. For what is the Ignatian view of episcopacy?

In the first place what Ignatius did not believe in was the monarchical bishop. There are many passages in his writings which show that the bishop is inconceivable apart from the presbyters who are united with him "as the strings are to the musical instrument" (Eph. 4:1) (cf. Philad 4: episkopos hama tō presbyteriō), and above all apart from the community (Magis. 6:1; Eph. 1:3; Tral. 1:1; Sm. 8, etc.). There is nothing "monarchical" about an office which can function only on the condition that it exists in harmony with the other ministries. The fact that in spite of that Ignatius still speaks of the bishop as a distinct ministry is due to the way he - in common with his contemporaries - understood the ministry of episkopē. And this, as we have seen, was in connection with the catholicity of the local church and the eucharist.

The association of episkopē with the ultimate authority and fullness of the local church and with the eucharist implied that whenever the local community was gathered together to celebrate the eucharist, the eschatological community was there present in its fullness. This inevitably meant that the structure which this community had at that moment is to be regarded as an image of the "heavenly" or ultimate structure of the world in which God reigns. Ignatius draws his view of episcopacy from the belief that in the local eucharistic gathering one figure is central and exercises final authority: God who gives to the world eternal life through communion in the Body of his Son - or, in terms of the Church structure which represents this, the president of the eucharistic community who "sits in the place of God" and surrounded by the presbyters (who represent the apostles sitting on their eschatological thrones) passes ultimate judgment on every matter pertaining to the Church.

Thus, the singling out of one of the presbyters or episkopoi to become ho episkopos was natural as soon as the eucharistic community was understood as portraying the Kingdom of God on earth (which again was a natural consequence of the understanding of the local church as capable of passing final judgment on everything - cf. I Cor. 5-6; Mt. 18, etc. - and of episkopē as the instrument of this function in relation to the eucharist - cf. I Clement, Didache). In this respect Ignatius acts within the theological tradition which was based on a particular understanding of biblical, especially Pauline, ecclesiology and was shared by his contemporaries as well as by subsequent generations. This is enough to explain why the Ignatian view of episcopacy prevailed in the second century without provoking any negative reactions anywhere.

C. The time after Ignatius is marked by some confusion as to the terminology concerning episcopacy as well as to its precise content. Even as late as Irenaeus the term presbyteros

seems to be used interchangeably with that of episkopos, which points to the fact that in certain areas (especially the West - cf. I Clement - to which Irenaeus belongs) the term episkopos was slow in replacing that of presbyteros. But even in this situation of terminological confusion there is no doubt that in Irenaeus' mind there is a distinct ministry of episcopacy alongside that of the presbyters.

With regard to content, there seems to be from the middle of the second century onwards a growing emphasis on the teaching authority of the bishop. This is probably due to the spread of Gnosticism and its claim to have secret access to the teaching of the apostles. The Martyrion of Polycarp, Justin (though not with particular emphasis) and especially Hegesippus (c. 175 A.D.) and Irenaeus present the bishop in terms of orthodoxy and as possessing, in the famous phrase of Irenaeus, a certain charisma veritatis. It is in this context that lists of episcopal successions are established which, it must be noted, are not intended to build up directly one universal apostolic succession, being rather, in the words of Hegesippus, "successions" (plural), that is, links with the apostles through the local communities ("in each city" Eusebius E.H. I, 22, 3, 5). Thus, in the face of the danger of Gnosticism it is again the ministry of the episkopé that the Church uses to prove its apostolic character, always, however, in connection with the local community and the head of its eucharistic assembly. (It is noteworthy that there have never appeared any lists of presbyters although the function of the presbyter was at that time precisely to teach.) The fact that the churches tried to prove that they had access to the apostolic teaching not through theologians and teachers or through lists of presbyters whose main function was in fact teaching, but through bishops, i.e. heads of the eucharistic assemblies (whose function was not primarily to teach), shows that once again the ministry of episkopé was closely related to the ecclesiology of the local church and its eucharistic character.

A clear description of both terminology and actual content appears with Irenaeus' disciple, Hippolytus, whose Apostolic Tradition contains all that is needed for a complete knowledge of what the Church at that time meant by episcopacy. This work is a combination of Hippolytus' personal theology with liturgical material which goes back to the middle of the second century at least. Even by studying only what seems to belong to the original material, the information we receive is extremely valuable and interesting. We may sum it up in the following manner.

a) The bishop is ordained primarily in order to offer the eucharist and ordain to the ministry (see: Prayer of ordination of the bishop). In contrast with this the prayer of ordination of the presbyter does not contain any mention of the offering of the eucharist or ordination but only of teaching the people and administering or "judging" them. This means that the original ministry of episkopé had by

then been split into two in accordance with the old principle that the bishop is the head of the eucharistic assembly and the image of God or Christ, while the presbyterium surround him as his synedrion (Ignatius), i.e. a court passing judgment in the image of the Twelve. The eschatological imagery of episkopé prevailed as a combination of two distinct functions, the christological and the apostolic.

b) The bishop is to the community alter Christus, which is a continuation of the eschatological-eucharistic function of episkopé, but also alter apostolus. This latter seems to contradict the Ignatian view according to which it is the presbyters and not the bishop who represent the apostles. Does it represent a development further than Ignatius towards a truly monarchical episcopacy? It is rather to be suspected that at this point we have a survival of the idea of apostolic succession which we encounter in I Clement, and which perhaps had survived in the West. This must have led naturally to the view of apostolic succession which through Cyprian, of whom more will be said later, found its way into the tradition of the Church. In any case, Hippolytus represents the first synthesis of two distinct functions within the one episkopé: what we have called the christological and the apostolic functions, which are now combined in the ministry of the bishop. This is done while still the presbyters are allowed, always collectively and together with the bishop, to exercise the "apostolic" functions: governing, teaching and judging. In other words, what Hippolytus represents is the view that the episkopos exercises both the christological functions of giving the Spirit, feeding the people, by presiding over the eucharist, etc. (which the presbyters are explicitly denied by Hippolytus) and the apostolic ones, while the presbyters are ordained to exercise together with the bishop. Neither, however, can exercise any of these functions in separation from the other and from the community: this is the implication of the fact that the ministry of episkopé is ultimately exercised only in the context of the eucharistic community. This prevents the early Church from developing a truly "monarchical" episcopacy.

The next step in the history of the concept of episcopacy is represented by Cyprian in the third century. His main contribution is that he takes the notion of episcopacy away from its christological connotations, and thus away from Hippolytus and very far indeed from Ignatius, in order to associate it primarily with the "apostolic" function. His view: episcopus, id est apostolus opens the way to the classical notion of apostolic succession in which episcopacy is essentially the continuation and exercise of apostolic ministry. He is, of course, still too ancient to abandon the idea of the local church as being the "catholic Church" and for this reason he regards each bishop as the successor of Peter. But it is clear that the image he holds of episcopacy is no longer Christ-centred

as was the case with Ignatius, the Syriac Didascalia, Hippolytus, etc., and becomes Peter-centred. When in later centuries the centrality and catholicity of the local church will be lost, this will lead to an episcopacy conceivable in itself, as a ministry above the local community and a succession of the "apostolic college". But more about this later.

In conclusion, the ministry of episkopé became right from the beginning of the post-apostolic age the focal ministry with the help of which the churches realized and expressed their communion with the Apostolic Church. This was done in connection with a certain ecclesiology according to which whenever the church of a particular place gathers together to celebrate the eucharist, it becomes the expression of the eschatological community gathered around Christ and the apostles (basically the Twelve, though the distribution did not exist at that time).

The ministry of episkopé was identified in this structure originally with those ministries representing Christ and the Twelve or apostles and called episkopoi or presbyteroi collectively. In certain areas like Syria where the view of the Church was determined by an eschatological and apocalyptic approach (Ignatius, Didascalia, etc.) the need was soon felt to distinguish between these two and under the impact of worship and the eucharistic experience to elevate the theocentric and christological element above the apostolic. This gave rise to the centrality of episkopos who was viewed for a long time in those areas as imago Christi (cf. besides Ignatius the Syriac Didascalia, the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies, etc.). In other areas like the West (cf. I Clement), the historical approach was predominant and the distinction did not occur so quickly. The episkopé could be expressed there for some time still under the old form of presbyteroi, a situation reflected even in the end of the second century when the distinction was in fact made (Irenaeus). What happened was that the christological (presiding over the eucharist, giving the Spirit through ordination, etc.) and the apostolic aspects of episkopé were united in the person of the bishop while the presbyterium retained the "apostolic" functions alone (teaching, judging, administering, etc.) which it shared with the bishop. In the end of this period (Cyprian) a tendency developed to view the bishop mainly in terms of apostolicity. But it is after Cyprian that the radical change takes place involving a reversal of functions in the relation between episcopacy and presbyterium.

D. Before going on to consider the situation as it developed after the fourth century, let us briefly mention another basic aspect of episcopacy in the early Church. What has been said so far seems to point to the local church as the

context in which episcopacy developed and was exercised. Indeed both the historical origins and the theology of episcopacy are rooted in the local church. This, however, does not mean that this ministry was irrelevant to the needs of the Church on a universal level. On the contrary it was precisely through episcopacy that these needs were served.

The early Church never ceased to be conscious of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church that exists in the whole world. But, significantly enough, sticking faithfully to the crucial decision made by the first post-apostolic generation, which we mentioned earlier, the early Church refused to recognize any ministry or structure which would by-pass or ignore the local church. It is for this reason alone that the ministry which expressed and safeguarded the unity of the Church on a universal level was episcopal.

If we study carefully the way conciliarity developed in the first centuries, we realize that the early Councils were extensions and even replicas of the way conciliarity was practised in the local church. (1) It was the Ignatian "synedrion episkopou" which was copied and used as a model, not, for example, the Apostolic Council of Acts. The early Councils were primarily concerned with eucharistic communion (e.g. the Pascal controversy, Montanism, even I Nicaea were all ultimately concerned with the break and restoration of communion and not with promulgating dogmas, as it is evident from Eusebius, E.H. V, 24 and from the anathemas which seal the decisions of all the early Councils). It was this reason which brought together the bishops who were still at that time regarded primarily as heads of the eucharistic assemblies. Episcopacy, therefore, became essential to conciliarity for the same reason it had already become essential to the life of the local church.

Through the ministry of episcopacy the early Church found a way of maintaining Cyprian's principle episcopatus unus est without contradicting the catholicity of the local Church, i.e. another principle significantly emphasized by Cyprian himself to the point of exaggeration (Ep. 55 (52). 21: as long as unity exists, each bishop gives account of his work solely and directly to God). The synods never became in the early Church a superstructure over and above the local communities, and for this reason they never acquired authority in themselves: they always had to be received by the communities in order to be fully valid. The conclusion from all this may sound strange but it seems inevitable: episcopacy, as it developed in the first three centuries, also with regard to councils, meant anything but

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(1) See the Faith and Order study on this subject: In Each Place, Towards a Fellowship of Local Churches Truly United. Geneva:WCC 1977.

the subjection of the laymen to the higher authority; it meant, on the contrary, that a ministry existed through which the Church remained in the final analysis a concrete community.

## II. THE FOURTH CENTURY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

A comparative study of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus and the liturgical and canonical documents which derived from it in the fourth and fifth centuries (Apostolic Constitutions, etc.) or of the third century Syriac Didascalia and its fourth century versions (e.g. its Ethiopic version), or even more interestingly, of the original texts of the letters of Ignatius and their enlarged version at the end of the fourth century (or the beginning of the fifth) shows consistently the following changes: whereas the original version of these texts refers the function of the offering of the eucharist only to the bishop and never to the presbyters, the later versions change the text on the relevant points to make it read that the presbyter, too, offers the eucharist, that he is called hiericus, etc. These striking alterations of the original documents are supported by other evidence coming from the same time (John Chrysostom, Ambrosiaster, Jerome, etc.) and suggesting that the bishop and the presbyter do not differ at all from the point of view of the eucharistic function.

It is clear that what stands behind this radical change is the emergence and establishment of the parish as a eucharistic gathering presided over by presbyters without the presence of the bishop. When and how the parish emerged is a complicated historical problem with which we cannot deal here. But it is important to try and even briefly point out the consequences that this situation has had for the understanding of episcopacy, since it is these consequences that have shaped the entire problematique with which we are still wrestling in theology.

In the first place, the fact that the presbyters started offering the eucharist more or less ipso jure (cf. prayers of ordination) has gradually meant that the essence of episcopacy is not to be found in the presidency of the eucharist but in other functions. Such functions are mainly administration (due to the increase of the number of parishes, their coordination became inevitably central to the bishop's role) and teaching (the magisterium), i.e. those functions originally belonging to the aspect of episkopé which was exercised by the presbyterium. This automatically meant an exchange of roles between presbyters and bishops which reached such proportions as not to expect the bishops to celebrate the eucharist except on certain days in the

year or not to expect from the presbyters any other responsibility (teaching, administration, etc.) apart from celebrating the eucharist. This meant that the bishop gave up what we called earlier the christological aspect of episkopé (presiding over the eucharist) and thus made himself redundant in the eyes of the Reformers some centuries later. He retained, of course, the exclusive right to ordain, but with the way theology developed in the Middle Ages, this was no longer understood as part of the christological aspect of episcopacy and became part of the potestas delegated through apostolic succession and a sacramentalistic view of ordination. When the entire notion of apostolic succession was put into question by the Reformation, this prerogative of the bishop was also lost. The result was that the Church could easily do without bishops, a conclusion which I find quite compelling once episcopacy is detached from the basis on which it was built in the first centuries. The Reformation drew the right conclusions from the fourth century and quite significantly it found support in Jerome in order to abolish episcopacy. Ignatius and the first three centuries, which in light of the sola scriptura principle did not count anyway, were identified with the post-fourth century view of episcopacy (the Ignatian bishop and the medieval bishop became more or less identical) and the debate grew and developed the way we know it.

The consequences, however, reached further. The reversal of functions between presbyter and bishop meant automatically that the ancient view of presbyteroi as constituting a collegium, like the Twelve, whose unity had to remain indivisible, was also lost. The presbyteral aspect of episkopé lost its collegial character and became individualized: one presbyter was sufficient to perform the eucharist and thus to fulfil the function of the presbyterium. But - to paraphrase an old saying - unus presbyterus nullus presbyterus: by giving the presbyter the functions which belonged originally to the bishop, the Church turned him into a bishop, and thus lost the presbyter. We need not say anything about the catastrophic consequences that this situation has had on the ministry of the deacon, since this falls outside our subject. But we must certainly underline the fact that the entire structure of the local church suffered destruction and disintegration as a result of the changes which took place in relation to episcopacy. Thus a eucharistic community could exist theoretically simply by the presence of one presbyter (private masses were a natural development) or the presence of one presbyter and the congregation. The bishop and the presbyters were no longer necessarily linked with the community, forming a caste of their own (the "priesthood") which had direct access to the apostolic origins, i.e. did not need to pass through the local church, through ordination. In this situation it became necessary to seek the catholicity of the Church outside the eucharistic gathering (e.g. in a universal structure or in non-eucharistic

activities) and thus to deprive the eucharist of its eschatological and ecclesiological dimensions and reduce it to a "means of grace", one sacrament among many. Whether the changes we have observed in the understanding and practice of episcopacy brought about these theological developments or the other way around, it is difficult to say. But certainly no historian can afford not to take notice of these "coincidences" which surround the history of episcopacy. There seems to be no way of reforming our theology without dealing with the question of episcopacy from the more general context of ecclesiology and particularly of the eucharist.

Since we are dealing here with history, it would be fair to add that the early Church did not altogether surrender episcopacy to the force of these changes. The historian comes across certain instruments or devices which the early Church developed more or less as antibodies to face the new changes. For example in the West the Church developed the revealing practice of the Fermentum: the bishop would send with the acolytes a portion of the eucharist which he had blessed in his cathedral to the parishes in order to be mixed with the presbyteral eucharist. This practice, which survives even in eighth-century Rome, shows that the Church never really allowed the idea to disappear that it is the bishop who presides over the eucharist of his church. In the East, where the Fermentum must also have existed in the early centuries, other liturgical customs surviving until now and having the force of strict canon law point in the same direction. For example, even today no presbyter can celebrate the eucharist except on a piece of linen (the Antimension) which bears the signature of the bishop of the place. Equally in all eucharistic celebrations the bishop's name must be mentioned aloud right at the crucial point of the anaphora. These and other provisions indicate that, at least liturgically, the bishop continues indirectly to be regarded as the president of the eucharistic assembly of the local church. This loses its significance, however, as long as in fact the bishop is the head of a huge diocese and has no direct access to his flock which he is unable to "oversee" both liturgically and pastorally. Equally it loses its significance as long as theology is unable to justify episcopacy with reference to its original theological "raison d'être". Episcopacy is the sick man of those who practise it. An ecumenical look at it is needed above all for the sake of those who believe in its significance.



### III. SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

1. The early Church is almost a priori regarded as a hindrance to unity when it comes to episcopacy. In this paper we made a distinction between the first three centuries and the later history. Indeed this later history has divided the Church. (I believe that the Reformation attacked that kind of episcopacy). Could perhaps the earlier part be of a more positive use?

2. What is common between us and the first three centuries is that we both live in a post-apostolic age. Personally I find the return-to-the-New Testament call in this case as the most deadly method to be adopted by a church which wishes to be alive. The New Testament, or rather the apostolic age, is irrevocably gone and cannot be copied simply because the apostles are gone and cannot be reproduced. We cannot reproduce Paul or Peter who saw the Lord and drew authority from this privilege. If history is of any help to us, it is the post-apostolic rather than the apostolic age that can offer it. Ignatius can be reproduced in that he could claim no access to the Lord more than a modern bishop can.

3. It is beyond any reasonable doubt that the post-apostolic generation opted in a way that led naturally to the Ignatian notion of episcopacy, simply by opting for the ultimate authority of the local church and associating episkopé with the eucharist. This, however, does not oblige all subsequent generations to do the same, even if the Holy Spirit was then at work, for the Holy Spirit can point to new ways at different times. We must not venerate history in a conservativistic manner. So what the first three centuries did is not obligatory for the Church today. Is there anything that period can offer?

4. If we study the content of the ministry of episcopacy in the first three centuries and the way it developed in close connection with the ecclesiology of the local church and the eucharistic community, we learn something about episcopacy which normally escapes the debates which take place. By opting for a single person in the community who would assume the ministry of episkopé precisely in the form of the eucharistic presidency, the early Church found the way to minister to the needs of catholicity on the local level. The natural and social world in which the Church lives involves divisions of all kinds (sex, race, age, profession, class, etc.). These have to be transcended in Christ and the eucharistic gathering was always understood as the event which brings about the transcendence. The turning of the president of the eucharistic assembly into the minister of the unity of the Church was found then to be essential. The same need exists at all times, since the above-mentioned problems of division remain the same.

Could the churches afford to exist without such a ministry? In fact this is a question that should be addressed both to the so-called "episcopal" churches and to the non-episcopal ones. For the episcopacy known to the former by no means corresponds to the ministry of episkopé which we find in the early Church.

5. While this proved the ministry of the episcopacy essential for the unity of the Church on the local level, the needs for a similar unity on the universal level could only be served through the same ministry, if there was to be faithfulness to the original option for the fullness of the local church. The fact that bishops became the sole decisive participants of the early Councils meant that the unity on the universal level should pass through the local church and not be independent of it. This made the unity of the Church a unity of communities and not of individuals, which would have been the case if there were no episcopal ministry through which the individual Christians would relate to the Church in the world. The same is true about the temporal aspect of communion through apostolic succession. The fact that it took place through the ministry of the bishop made apostolic succession a succession of communities.

6. Finally another aspect of the ministry concerned the coordination of the charismata of the other ministries in the community. By being the sole ordainer to the ministry, the bishop served the need of the Church to keep all its ministries relational coming from one source and belonging to one body. An episkopé over the entire charismatic and ministerial life of the Church was at that time understood not as authoritarian supervision and control but as a means of uniting the charismata into the one body of the one Christ. In this sense, by being part of the community, the early bishop was the servant of a particular need of the Church which, at that time at least, was thought to be absolutely essential.

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This is a "utilitarian" view of the ministry of episcopacy, as it developed in the early Church. Since the utilitarian argument exercises a lot of power on the churches of our time, it should be taken perhaps into account. But, to remember our duty as historians, the early Church did not plan its ministries primarily according to the needs of the time but mainly according to the vision it held of the eschatological nature of the Church which was taken quite seriously at that time. This is why the early Church kept faithfully the christological and the apostolic aspects of episkopé. Their primary concern was to maintain clearly the vision of the Kingdom always before its eyes, and episcopacy in its Ignatian form was found to be essential for such a purpose.

## EPISCOPACY IN THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA

Ananda Rao Samuel

### Introduction

This paper is a survey of episcopacy in relation to the birth and growth of the Church of South India, hereinafter called CSI. The burden for a united church in India could be traced back to the year 1919. Thirty-three leaders of different churches in India gathered together in Tranquebar and met for four days for prayer and for consideration of the mission and unity of the Church. Two of the leaders were western and the remaining thirty-one were Indians. It is in the context of the mission of the Church that the unity of the Church impinged on the minds of the Christian leaders and it is in the context of the unity of the Church that episcopacy became a vital consideration. This has to be borne in mind. Some people at the time of the union of the CSI said that this search for union is a pragmatic approach, implying thereby that unity is subservient to mission. But it is acutely felt then and now that the division of the Church has impaired the witness of the Church and oftentimes made a mockery of our proclamation of the Gospel. Disunity is a negation of the truth of the Gospel. Mission and unity are inseparable.

#### I. THE COMING INTO BEING OF EPISCOPACY IN THE CSI

At the meeting in Tranquebar an appeal was prepared and sent out to all the churches in India. It is indeed a historic document and it is a wonder how in the year 1919 in India some leaders could come to such an understanding of the whole issue and send out one of the most moving appeals to all the protestant churches in India. The relevance of that appeal for our consideration here is that one of the four important bases for union cited therein is historic episcopate.

"In seeking union the Anglican members present stand for the one ultimate principle of the historic episcopate. They ask the acceptance of the fact of episcopacy and not any theory as to its character. The South India United Church members believe it is a necessary condition that the episcopate

should reassume a constitutional form on the primitive, simple, apostolic model ... We understand that the acceptance of the fact of the episcopate does not involve the acceptance of any theory of the origin of episcopacy nor any doctrinal interpretation of the fact." (1)

From the time the call for union was issued from Tranquebar, the one point which swung the churches in so many directions was episcopacy. It would be a long story if I were to recount the vicissitudes of this debate about episcopacy which lasted nearly twenty-eight years, from 1919 to 1944. The Anglicans were insisting that there must be some kind of supplemental ordination or mutual commissioning with laying on of hands so that the ministries of all the churches joining the union would become acceptable to all and would be unified right from the beginning. This was debated in India, in England, in the United States, in Australia and other countries also. Most of the Anglicans were adamant on this point. They said in unmistakeable terms that this is something which cannot be given up inasmuch as "the Anglicans had consented to the recognition of spiritual equality, of the universal priesthood of all believers and of the rights of the laity to their full expression in the Church. This principle of spiritual equality shall be maintained throughout at every step of the negotiations." There were exchanges between leaders in England and their counterparts in India. There were appeals and counter appeals. Tension mounted up, hopes were abandoned, no side would budge. Then came the breakthrough by the daring lead given by Bishop Hollis of Madras. He asked his brother bishops in South India to sign the following statement with him.

"After the inauguration of union we, as bishops of The CSI, shall be ready ourselves to receive communion at the hands of any bishop or presbyter of the united church. All who have the status of presbyters in the united church are capable of performing all the functions assigned to presbyters in the united church by the constitution of that church in every congregation in the united church; that no presbyter of the united church will exercise his ministry in a congregation where members conscientiously object to his ministrations, and that no member of the united church can 'conscientiously object' to the ministrations of any presbyter ordained within the united church. The suitability of a presbyter for a particular congregation is another question and will have to be considered in all cases by the appointing authority." (2)

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(1) B. Sundkler: Church of South India, The Movement Towards Union 1900-1947. London: Lutterworth Press, 1954, p. 102.

(2) Ibid., p. 321.

The effect of this statement was electrifying. It changed the whole situation from one of gloom to one of light. This was the last straw that made union possible. We thank God for the simple and bold step of Bishop Hollis and his brother bishops. Bishop Hollis was a great statesman of the church. For the sake of union he suffered much, but the joy of fulfillment to him and to the whole church is greater than the price which he and the church had had to pay.

Supplemental ordination, mutual commissioning, etc. were all set aside. In the service of inauguration of the CSI, the five Anglican bishops were first commissioned by the ministers of Methodist and SIUC churches to exercise the office of a bishop in all the congregations of the whole church. All the ministers were recognized as such in the united church without any further rite of ordination or commissioning.

This step is one of the most glorious things that happened in the inauguration of the CSI. All ministers were accepted without any judgment or evaluation, rite or ceremony. Of course, because of this step the CSI became a suspect church of a dubious nature. Many Anglican Provinces cut off their connections with the CSI. It was only after about twenty-five years of life as a united church that Anglican Provinces began to develop full communion and intercommunion with the CSI. I may be forgiven for speaking about the Church of North India (CNI) at this juncture. CNI was formed in 1970. Through the rite of unification which was through mutual laying on of hands, the ministries were fully united. In the CNI it is said by some that this is a much better way of doing things than the practice followed in the CSI. God alone can judge. History alone can pass the verdict. Maybe in the economy of God's doings both are acceptable. But the fundamental principle which guided the leaders of the union of the CSI in all their negotiations was that it is God who ordains and God who equips and not what we have or possess which makes ordination or ministry valid. It is a continual dependence on God which is our equipment for our ministry.

Also there was and still is the big debate about episcopacy being the esse or bene esse of the Church. If we have to be true to the history of the Church in India and recognize the acts of God, we cannot but say that episcopacy is of the bene esse and not the esse of the Church. The triune God alone is the esse of the Church.

## II. HOW IS EPISCOPACY UNDERSTOOD?

I shall quote here the portion of the CSI Constitution on the episcopacy which should shed some light on this matter:

"The CSI accepts and will maintain the historic episcopate in a constitutional form. But this acceptance does not commit it to any particular interpretation of episcopacy or to any particular view or belief concerning orders of the ministry and it will not require the acceptance of any such particular interpretation or view as a necessary qualification for its ministry." (1)

The main responsibility of a bishop in the CSI is pastoral oversight. A bishop is a leader in evangelism. He is a teacher. He is the one who has responsibility for worship among the people. He is the one who administers discipline in the diocese. He is a father in God. "He knows he is called, appointed and endowed. He is ever striving to be faithful to the Lord of the Church, knowing that the future of his church is safe in the hands of Him to whom the Church belongs." (Bishop Sumitra)

There is no idea or hint that episcopacy has any special powers in itself. It is a symbol, a service, a cross to carry. The bishop is the focal point of the fellowship of the Church. Through his life and example people accept him and recognize him as a man of God and follow him with love and respect. But if marks of godliness and concern for the people are not seen in the bishop, the people do not accept and follow him.

### III. WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE WITH EPISCOPACY IN THE LAST THIRTY YEARS?

In some measure the hopes and expectations about episcopacy have come true. Almost uniformly the bishops of the CSI have been humble men and found their way to the hearts of the people. To give just two examples: Bishop Hollis and Bishop Sumitra, the first two moderators of the CSI, set for the other bishops in the CSI a striking example of humility and simplicity. This has had a great influence upon episcopacy as it was shaped in the CSI. The overtones of hierarchical pomp and glory have been set aside to a great extent in the CSI. The CSI bishops have been the bishops of the people. They have to live with the people and for the people.

We have also found that episcopacy has been a very effective instrument both of mission and unity. I would refer here only to the formation of the Joint Council of CNI-CSI-Mar Thoma Church of July 1978. This has had a significant impact

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(1) The Constitution of the Church of South India, p. 9

upon mission and unity in India. For us in India in a very obvious manner mission and unity are two sides of the same coin. Another factor which has emerged in the CSI is the bishop-in-council principle. The bishop is not an autocrat and he cannot act as such. He has no veto except in matters of faith and order in which he can only suspend decision until the Synod gives a ruling. The council and the bishop have to interact all the time. Together they move forward to the point where they can say "it seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit". This is unanimous action. There is usually no question of minorities being ignored. Usually the bishop plays a moderating role. In some dioceses on many issues vote is not taken unless it is constitutionally obligatory. It would be either unanimous action or, if there is sharp division, the matter would be laid on the table for further consideration and study and then consensus would be reached. This is in no small measure due to the principle of the bishop-in-council which has become an important principle of deliberation and action in the CSI.

One of the things which is causing anxiety in the CSI about episcopacy is that bishops are loaded with too much administration. In a setting where there is shortage of leadership and paucity of funds, it can be easily understood how this kind of situation comes about. There are also trends of over-centralisation in the CSI. Therefore, CSI is seriously seeking to stem this tide of centralisation. The Synod has passed a resolution that every diocese must appoint an administrator who will take the load off the shoulders of the bishop so that the bishop can give more time and attention to the development of leadership, renewal of the congregations and the tasks of mission and unity.

#### IV. HOW DID THE CHURCHES ACCEPT EPISCOPACY?

In the beginning some sections of the church had their own doubts and misgivings. One of the major fears was that the ex-Anglican sections of the CSI would superimpose their own patterns of administration, worship and episcopacy on the whole of CSI. They feared that the CSI would become a replica of the Anglican Church. But gradually these fears were dispelled. The first Moderator, Bishop Hollis, was himself an Anglican, but through his life and example and the leadership he gave to the CSI, the whole church came to realize that the CSI was on a path all its own to be charted by the Holy Spirit. Bishop Hollis was anything but a staunch and haughty Anglican. In fact, he leaned more towards the non ex-Anglican type of polity. This could be said of every ex-Anglican bishop who came into the CSI. The bishops from other traditions had to find their feet as to the role of a bishop. In one way it was a great opportunity that a new brand of episcopacy was here in the making: episcopacy related to the people, drawing its continual sustenance from

the living God in the matrix of mission and unity. The late Bishop Sumitra, whom I have already quoted, in his own life and ministry combined in a remarkable way extreme simplicity with great authority of love and service. For the early CSI bishops it must have been an extremely difficult task. But they did it through the grace of God.

#### V. WHAT PROBLEMS AROSE?

Sometimes it so happens that a bishop stays in a diocese for a long number of years. In the CSI there is no way by which a bishop can be transferred. Therefore, we are now proposing certain changes in the constitution. The following questions may be raised for our consideration:

1. What provisions can be made so that a bishop does not stay in the diocese for too long a time? Should we make some provision, or should we not?
2. What steps have to be taken to counteract centralisation?
3. How do we help episcopacy to perform its primary function and not be sidetracked by other concerns?

#### VI. HOW DID THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EPISCOPACY AND PRESBYTERS WORK OUT?

All ordinations are to be performed by the bishops. Episcopal ordination has become the order of the CSI. But even after the thirty year period, the CSI has decided that ministers from non-episcopal churches with which the CSI is in communion will be received into the CSI without any rite of commissioning or ordination. Though this makes for certain irregularity, still the acceptance and continuance of non-episcopally ordained presbyters underlines the truth that in the final analysis God is the ordainer and he is the validator of our ordination and that the Church is perfected not by what we can infuse into it but by what God grants and empowers, justification by faith through grace.

One of the most important duties of a bishop is to be in constant touch with his presbyters. His relationship to the presbyters is that of a friend, a brother and a father in God. Hitherto before union it was a committee or a council which took care of the presbyters. But now there is a person to whom they can turn as a friend, a counsellor and a colleague, a person not absolute in himself, but a person who is in turn guided and supported by a group of persons. Are there other ways in which a better relationship could be evolved between the bishop and the presbyters? What are the dangers that have to be guarded against in the relationship between a bishop and his presbyters? What measures have to be taken for a genuine relationship of understanding and mutual support?



## VII. DID EPISCOPACY REDUCE OR ENHANCE SYNODICAL FUNCTIONING?

From the beginning the three principles of episcopacy, presbyterianism and congregationalism were worked into the texture of the CSI. It can be said without any fear of contradiction that episcopacy has in no way reduced the synodical functioning; on the contrary, it has enhanced it. The Synod is the supreme governing and legislative body of the CSI. The lay people are more in number in the Synod than the bishops and presbyters put together. This is the way in which it has been provided for in the CSI Constitution. There are no different houses in the Synod. Bishops are like other members. Episcopacy died along with the synodical system and the congregational tradition and all of them rose again enriched. This is the essence of the experience of the CSI and its journey into union and in union. Even on matters of faith and order when the bishops separately deliberate and take a vote, the final decision is subjected to the Synod and will be taken by the Synod.

## VIII. THE PROBLEMS OF UNION

Episcopacy is still the most difficult issue in the path towards union and this has almost become the rock on which many a scheme has been wrecked. Is there any other way that we can think of at the present time whereby we can work for union? In the CSI historic episcopate maintained in a constitutional way was one of the most potent factors which helped in promoting unity among the different heritages and traditions. Are there ways in which episcopacy can become less of a stumbling block? New impetus and encouragement has to be given to the movement for unity in different parts of the world where negotiations for union have failed or floundered. There is some disenchantment about unity and union talks. Is it that the synodical churches are dispirited by the inflexible stand of the episcopalians about episcopacy? Should there be more give and take, more understanding, respect for one another? Does union lead to centralisation? Does episcopacy contribute to that centralisation? Is centralisation another stumbling block on the road to unity? Is it organic unity or conciliar unity, or is it a new kind of unity which the Lord of the Church is beckoning us to?

## IX. LIVING IN A UNITED CHURCH

Living in a united church is a pain and a joy, pain of accepting your neighbour and joy of discovering that he is your brother. It is dying and rising again. It is to take risks in the full knowledge and confidence that the risks are taken in obedience to God's call. It is obedience to the

call of mission and unity. It is open-ended. More and more I find leaders of many churches subordinating unity to mission. I feel that this kind of subordination is contrary to the insight that we gain from the New Testament. If I might put it simply, mission is liberation and unity is reconciliation. They go together. "When I am lifted up I shall draw all men unto myself." The whole thing is to be placed also in the setting of the unity of humankind. The unity of the Church is the earnest and the precursor of the unity of humankind. The unity of the Church is not the end, nor is it the ultimate. The ultimate is the king and the kingdom.

EPISCOPACY IN THE ANGLICAN AND LUTHERAN  
CHURCHES IN TANZANIA

Martin Mbwana

Introduction

The Lutherans and Anglicans form the major group of non-Roman Catholic Christians in Tanzania, with about 800,000 and 700,000 adherents respectively. Both churches came to Tanzania with the missionary expansion of the nineteenth century and since then have grown to have indigenous leadership. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) was established in 1963 and today has thirteen dioceses (or Synods). The Church of the Province of Tanzania (Anglican) was formed in 1970 and is divided into nine dioceses.

In certain areas of the country, and in the urban centres, the two churches co-exist. There are, however, areas where either church is the main non-Roman Catholic denomination. This is mainly due to an agreement in the past for the missionary societies to have areas of influence. Thus in the north-eastern part the Lutherans are stronger than Anglicans while in the south-eastern part the Anglicans are stronger than the Lutherans. Indeed present-day Christians happen to be mainly Lutherans or Anglicans mainly because of the location of their tribe rather than by theological persuasion.

I. THE "HIGH" AND "LOW"

In either church there are two distinct traditions of churchmanship. Within the ELCT, there are those who would belong to a "high" churchmanship and normally have "dioceses" and "bishops". There would also be those with a "low" churchmanship and normally have "synods" and "presidents". Similarly, though the Anglicans have only "dioceses" and "bishops", four

of the dioceses owe their origin to the work of the Church Missionary Society which is of a "low" churchmanship, while the remaining five dioceses owe their origin to the work of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa which has a "high" churchmanship. In this respect, therefore, the two churches have something in common that affects their understanding of episcopacy.

This distinction was indeed inherited from the missionary period and the fact that it so amicably continues to co-exist in both churches is a sign that the question of "diversity in unity" is not only between denominations but also is to be manifested within a particular denomination. The historical past of the different missionary societies is in a way used to enrich the young churches.

The rivalries and suspicions of the missionary period are being forgotten and both churches are joining together to further the work of Christ in Tanzania. Both churches have now national officers who help in coordination and communication within Tanzania and with their respective confessional bodies. There are national conferences which help to plan the work of both churches in relation to the agreed tasks of the dioceses (or synods). There is today less competition between dioceses of the different churchmanships and several institutions are being run for each church (instead of the "mission" of diocese). Both churches are members of the Christian Council of Tanzania.

## II. THE EPISKOPE IN PRACTICE

I once asked a Lutheran President of one of the Synods what the difference was between him and a bishop of a Lutheran diocese. He replied quite happily: "Nothing! He likes to be called bishop while I don't!"

As this paper is intended to be on the practical aspects of episcopacy, and not doctrinal, I would like to restrict myself to that aspect of the subject and refrain from making doctrinal comparisons or judgments.

Episkopé is a central, not just a domestic, question for the Church. The real meaning of the word is "oversight", and in all churches someone, or a group of people, is charged with this important task. It is with this understanding that this short paper approaches the subject as is manifested by those who have this task in Tanzania. It is, however, one man's observation and interpretation, and that of neither the ELCT nor of the Church of the Province of Tanzania. I have not had time to share these observations with the leaders or members of either church. Hence these are very preliminary observations.

As far as I can see the distinction is not simply as the Lutheran President quoted above seemed to imply. It has to take into consideration the style of episcopacy, i.e. whether monarchical or presidential. It has to take into account the gulf (where it exists) between those who have leadership and those over whom they have "oversight". And in the case of Tanzania, it has to take into consideration the fact that most of the bishops (or presidents) have taken over from expatriate (missionary) predecessors. These aspects affect not only the different understanding of episcopacy but also how it is fulfilled in practice.

Throughout the country bishops (and presidents) have been given authority over the affairs of the Church. This authority is derived from the Church and normally is exercised, as far as possible, with the consent and support of the rest of the Church. In practice, therefore, people are given this authority only after a careful process of election and then a service of commissioning (or consecration). The modes of election may differ from area to area. In the case of the Anglicans, an electoral college is set up that is charged with the duty of submitting an initial list of names of candidates to the House of Bishops. When this list is approved, the electoral college votes and the candidate with a majority of votes is declared bishop. The electoral college has both lay and clerical members. Though I am not aware of how the bishops and presidents of ELCT are elected, I would presume that a similar process is followed.

Having thus been duly elected and appointed to the office, the bishop (or president) is then invested with the authority of his office. Both for the Lutherans and Anglicans this authority implies his being able to guard the tradition of the Church and maintain a personal life that is exemplary to the church in his care. It also implies some operational skills in liturgical and administrative matters. Matters of faith and order are explicitly under the care of the bishop or president. This responsibility is helped by the fact that before reaching any decisions, there is the opportunity of consulting with other bishops or presidents in each church. Both churches have synodical governments where matters are discussed before implementation. Recourse can also be made to the worldwide Lutheran World Federation (in the case of ELCT) and the bodies of the Anglican Communion. Such matters, of course, demand study, prayer and witness of not only the bishop but also of other members of the church.

The administrative role of the bishop (or president) is shared according to the structures of the diocese (or synod). In most cases, the bishop is chairman of the governing body of his area. He may also be appointed chairman of other committees in the national church. As chairman, therefore, he fulfills the role of guiding the fulfilment of goals set by the church for that particular period. He sees that personnel is available for the implementation of decisions agreed and where possible assists such personnel to interpret rightly the priorities of the church.

In addition to this administrative role, the bishop (or president) has the responsibility of pastoral oversight in his area. In Tanzania this takes most of his time. The country being basically rural, the bishops travel extensively for preaching engagements and administering the "episcopal" sacraments, i.e. confirmations and ordinations (in the case of the Anglicans) and commissioning new pastors (in the case of the Lutherans). While on such tours, the bishop (or president) also takes the opportunity of "seeing his flocks"; and quite often he may take over the duties of the local minister in order that the latter may take his vacation.

#### CONCLUSION

In fulfilling the basic responsibilities of the episkopé, there is no basic difference between the Anglican and Lutheran leadership in Tanzania. They have roles in the administrative and pastoral aspects in the respective areas of which they have charge. They appoint, install and oversee the clergy and other staff of their areas. They administer those sacraments which are exclusively reserved for the bishop or president of the church. It must be pointed out in conclusion, however, that there has been no formal recognition by either church of the episkopé of the other; except in the case of the "high" Lutheran bishops of the north-western dioceses. At the consecration of both Lutheran bishops in this area, Anglican bishops were present and took part in the laying on of hands. There are two Lutheran dioceses in Tanzania with an episcopally ordained ministry.

## EPISKOPE AS SEEN THROUGH SOUTH AMERICAN EYES

S. Escobar

At several points in the last five years bishops have hit the news in Latin America, in an unexpected way. We were used to the image of bishops - usually fat and old men - performing perfunctorily official duties at fixed dates of the year. We associated the image of bishop with a solemn figure extending his hand to be kissed by children, Indians and old women. Not so any more! Those bishops who hit the news are different characters. Like that lean, ascetic Spaniard, well-known as a defender of the Indians, whose life has been threatened several times in Matto Grosso, Brazil. Or like that Lutheran bishop who did his best to save some human lives in Chile, and was asked not to return after one of his trips. Or like that serious thinker and teacher whose weekly Sunday messages on the radio are heard all over the province of Santa Fe in Argentina, and read in many papers all over the country on Mondays. Or like those seventeen bishops from Latin America and North America who gathered in Riobamba, Ecuador, when their meeting was interrupted by heavily armed military forces. They were rounded up, treated as common delinquents, taken to military barracks in Quito, after a rough trip in trucks, and then dismissed without any apologies.

Some of us, Latin American Protestants, were used to that kind of treatment from police forces ten or fifteen years ago, before the winds of religious freedom had blown around the world. But who would have dreamed ten years ago of Roman Catholic bishops being treated like that? Suddenly the average man on the street is watching the rise of a new kind of bishop in Latin America.

No one would have dreamed that university students, the intelligentsia and journalists would avidly wait to hear and read the latest pronouncement of a bishops' assembly. But that is what I have witnessed in Peru, Brazil and Argentina in the last couple of years. The pastoral role of these leaders of the Church - teaching, guiding, encouraging, defending - is suddenly being taken seriously by many more people than in the past in Latin America. The position of a bishop is not anymore the comfortable crown of a priest's career. It has become a dangerous position where every word and every move can mean attacks from left and right, problems

with the government, and even the threat of an "accidental" death; at least for some of the existing bishops, those who are shaping the new image that hits the eye of the average observer.

Of course, these are signs of change in the Church herself. Signs of a ferment which is running through the ranks of baptised people who are considered Roman Catholic and constitute the religious majority of Latin America. What course will this movement take? How will this ferment affect the daily life of the vast masses? All these are open questions. We have not yet seen enough to predict the answers.

#### TWO DIFFERENT HISTORICAL OUTLOOKS

The picture of the contrast between the old image of the bishops and the new one that we have sketched has to be complemented by understanding another contrast of the past that has shaped the personal outlook of this writer. It is the contrast between a "Protestant" outlook, peculiar to Latin American Protestantism, and that of the pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism.

From the middle of the last century Protestantism has grown at a surprising rate in Latin America. We usually recognise at least three streams of Protestant advance. One would be the ethnic or "transplanted" communities that simply reproduced European Church patterns in Latin American soil. Usually they were not evangelistic of the native population. They even kept a foreign language in worship as a symbol of their "separate" existence in our nations. Such were the Lutherans in Chile and Brazil, the Anglicans in several countries, the Waldensians in Italian or Swiss colonies of the River Plate republics. In the second place we have the communities that were formed out of the evangelistic effort of missionary-minded denominations, and interdenominational independent or "faith" missions. These were Evangelical in their outlook and, in spite of their particular theological tradition, socially they adopted an Anabaptist or non-conformist stance. This can be understood as a reaction to established Roman Catholicism. In the third place we have the Pentecostal forces born out of local revivals, or as a result of Pentecostal missionary efforts from Europe and North America. This third group shares some elements of the Evangelical outlook and the Anabaptist stance that we have ascribed to the second group.

To a certain degree the first group kept an outlook of the relations between people and bishops that was similar to the Roman Catholic one. But it was considerably weakened by the simple fact that being expatriate communities, and minorities outside their own Constantinian milieu, the role of the bishop did not have the weight of social status that it had "back at home".



The other two groups shared an ecclesiology that we could describe as "populist" using a modern political word. A strong emphasis on the local church or fellowship, on "democratic" forms of church government, on the Lutheran principle of the priesthood of all believers, and on the right and duty of every believer to be an active propagator of the Evangelical faith, created a dynamism and mobility which explains, at least in part, the amazing growth of the last hundred years. Here we see in action some of those elements that Roland Allen outlined as the condition for "spontaneous expansion" of the church. Only after the fifties have Roman Catholic scholars and church leaders begun to recognise that this advance was not just "sheep stealing", that the Latin American masses were pagan or de-Christianised, and that the Roman Church had not in four centuries developed the means and dynamics to minister to her baptised masses.

The encounter of these advancing forces with the Catholic Church accentuated in the latter at some points the emphasis on authority of the hierarchy, social control of belief and practice, even use of the civil power to impose the official religion - all of these characteristics had become part of the Catholic Church pattern during the imperial domain of Spain in Latin America. We could also say that the Catholic reaction accentuated the "populist" ecclesiology of Latin American Protestantism.

The change that at this point in time we witness inside Roman ranks is partly the effect of this encounter and partly the result of Vatican II winds that were already in action at some focal points, even before the council. Closeness between pastors and people, mobilisation of laymen, the Bible in the hands of every believer, house meetings, joyful singing and spontaneous prayer, these are just some of the marks of Latin American Protestantism that are now being adopted by the Roman Church. It is true that sometimes the sanction and enthusiasm of a Dutch or Belgian missiologist has been necessary in order to have them accepted. But the Catholic believer knows that they were in existence, just around the block for decades, though only now are they imitated.

#### QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

We live in a new stage of protestant life that challenges us with critical questions. It is my opinion that several protestant bodies in Latin America are experiencing now a need for bishops. To begin with, there is a desperate need for pastors. "Populist ecclesiology" has its own limitations and we discover them as a second and third generation of Evangelicals grow up in our communities. There is need for pastors that will tend the flock, especially in times of crisis and transition, like the times we are facing right now. And then logically there is the need for shepherds to the shepherds. In critical hours we do not seem to have representative

voices that can speak with an authority that comes from the Word and the Spirit, and is consequently recognised by a people that is sensitive to the Word and the Spirit.

The ecclesiological question is one of the most important items for theology in Latin American Protestantism. And an important aspect of it is precisely the way in which these pastoral needs can be met in a creative way, both biblical and contextual. The Free Church impatience with institutionalised patterns of church authority can sometimes give way to poor substitutes for the pastoral task.

The authority pattern of some Pentecostal Churches in Latin America has been studied, and it shows the existence of a strong "caudillo" type of leadership, that is made up of a combination of father, boss and military commander. It seems adequate for migrant people who experience in the city the loneliness and the need for belonging of those who come from the rural areas. There are Pentecostal Churches which have an episcopal structure and bishops who are recognised as true "caudillos" and followed. The lack of articulation and definition of this pattern makes it impossible to find ways to check natural trends toward authoritarianism and open abuse. The same could be said of some other Evangelical and Free Churches.

On the other hand, big and powerful interdenominational organisations impose, through the media and massive mobilisation, some popular and appealing figures that tend to fill the role of bishops especially in the teaching aspects of that role. But teaching has to be given by persons who live with the people of God day after day, who face with them the problems, tensions, suffering and joy of daily life in a nation. A "star" that comes to a country for a week, fills a stadium during four nights, offers his opinions about everything and then moves on to the other end of the world to do the same, is not an authorised voice. However, the power of organisation, machinery and dollars give him the image of a bishop, and the platform to perform the role which is a poor substitute for real pastoral functions. Do not misunderstand me. We need the teaching ministry of the Word from people of God wherever they come from. But we should not impose on them the task of pastoring and teaching simply because they have a platform and we do not have bishops.

The bishops we need have to be Evangelical. This I understand to be people with a sense of mission, a clear idea of what the evangel is, and concern for the material and spiritual hunger of masses inside and outside the churches. Latin American Protestant Churches are advancing churches. Their very existence comes from the Evangelical zeal of those who came to evangelise even when some official voices in Christendom dismissed them, as in Edinburgh 1910.

Protestants like myself have admiration and expectations for the new breed of bishops that is appearing in the Roman Catholic Church. We hope that the kind of "disestablishment" process that this Church is experiencing in some countries will purify her and may even produce a New Reformation inside her. Meanwhile however we believe that we have a tremendous task of evangelising and disciplining millions of pagans or nominal Christians, who show evidences of real spiritual hunger. And we also believe that there is more than ever a need to make clear through word and deed God's Word of judgment and hope for societies that have the exterior signs of Christianity but have lost the spiritual dynamism of it in social life. The ecclesiological answer to the pastoral needs of our churches that I have outlined, cannot be in contradiction with the missionary and evangelistic thrust that has marked our churches.

Is this an impossible dream? No, a biblical pattern cannot be an impossible dream. It seems to me that as a process of disestablishment affects the Church of Christ in many areas of the world, Christians from the most varied backgrounds are starting to hunger for a renewed biblical vision of Church, people and bishops. We have seen some of them. Just some weeks ago I attended a conference of Anglicans from the diocese of the North of Argentina in Misión Chaqueña. Three hundred Christians from churches spread through four Argentinian provinces. Bishops and people sharing the same dust, the same poor food, the same risks, the same dreams, the same gospel, the same hope. Joyful in the fact of their growth, telling the miracles of God's grace saving people today, encouraging one another, these brethren in Christ were typical Latin American Evangelicals. And they were people, pastors and bishops.









